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APRIL



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J. T. McIntosh

Mission

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KRIS NEVILLE

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 4, No. 4

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FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

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It had been an uneventful trip except for the last part. Scouts were a vital part of the communication system of a galaxy and presumably always would be. Ships could crack the speed of light and radio waves never would. Thus scouts went out for news and came back with bales of tape recordings. They did not land on the worlds they visited. That would take too long. They orbited about one world after another, recording all that world had to report and broadcasting Earth's news in return.

But when the *Slithy Toves* entered Zone 43 — the systems of Manta, Commerline and Atacta — it was at once made clear that she was not welcome. There was some sort of war going on, apparently, and Zone 43 wanted to keep it to itself — to such an extent that it had been prepared to blast the scout out of space. The *Slithy Toves* hadn't waited. She had gone so far and so fast that even if there had been pursuit there was little chance of any Zone 43 ships being anywhere near when Cope decided to go free.

Cope snapped off the force field and leaned back. The field had been on not for reasons of defense, but to help to hold the little ship together while a hundred different strains were trying to tear her apart.

"I hesitate to interfere with your handling of your job," remarked Pretzel Fisher in her usual irritating drawl, "but someone has been trying to communicate with us for the last five minutes."

"Communicate!" exclaimed Cope. "Here?"

"So," said Pretzel, maddeningly indifferent, "it seems."

Cope heaved himself out of the pilot's chair into the seat before the radio equipment.

Scouts' crews were half men and half women for one main reason. Any other system was ridiculous. Cope was in command and Pretzel Fisher second, but that wasn't because Cope was a man and Pretzel a woman. Bob Best was junior to Ann Downing. That was the whole crew.

Cope was the radio officer and that was also coincidental. Each scout carried a radio officer, a technician, a recorder and an armaments officer. Any of the lieutenants could command. When Cope was promoted to a bigger ship, the *Slithy Toves* would be commanded by Pretzel Fisher, recorder, and a young radio officer would join the scout as the junior lieutenant.

"The signals are very weak," Cope commented, "from this system, which isn't explored." He sighed turgidly. "Once again we become missionary pioneers, reaching out the hand of friendship and progress to a race untouched by human civilization. Once more a race in the dawn is brought to full day."

"Once more you talk too much," said Pretzel. "Let's just wait and see, huh?" She smiled arrogantly.

"New set of tubes warming," said Cope. "It'll need all we've got to hear them from here. So what can we do but talk?"

"We could move in, I suppose?"

"We could but we won't. We'll hear what they have to say first."

They had bickered for so long now that they could do it automatically, their minds on other things. Once when Cope had looked into Pretzel's cabin she muttered without really waking up: "God, now he's in my dreams. I'll have to give up sleep."

They waited and wondered. Unless the radio messages were from the crew of some wrecked ship, or an early colony which had lost touch with Earth, it was unlikely they would understand them anyway. Any race which used radio, however, must communicate by sound or sight, and a lot could be learned from either.

Cope was young for a scout commander, still under 30. His features were ill-assorted. There was a blue and a brown eye, a large, aggressive nose, and faint, apologetic eyebrows. His mouth was the mouth of an artist, in constant conflict with his fierce, cleft chin, always somewhat blue.

Ann Downing was twenty, slim, eternally resentful, and no beauty. Her face and ears and nose and chin were too small for her mouth, which was immense. On state occasions she would paint some of it out and keep it shut. Then she looked quite pretty. She was the one among them who was most bound up in her job. She only really came to life when she was working. She was the technician.

Bob Best was very eager to please, with the inevitable result that he seldom did. He was tall and awkward. Cope and the others knew that when enough of his attention was occupied by the present time situation, he forgot to try to please, and did his job.

Pretzel *was* a beauty and 100 per cent aware of it. She was tiny and exquisite, and in constant tribute to her own perfection she kept herself immaculate twenty-four hours of the artificial day. At the moment, while the others were dressed in soiled, shapeless overalls, she wore a spotless white pleated skirt and an orange silk blouse, drawn tight to her wide black belt and open to the waist. Why she was there at all was a problem which she could no more attempt to answer than the others.

The speaker came to life. With the first sounds, though they could not understand a word, it was obvious that they had to deal with humanoids, therefore humans, and therefore the descendants of people who had left Earth within the last 500 years.

Other intelligent races had been discovered, not very many and not very prolific, but some. Nothing even remotely humanoid, however. Any-one who talked as the speaker in the control room of the *Slithy Toves*

We may be all wrong in assuming, as we do so often, that pioneering in space will result in a wondrous social organism. It really isn't reasonable to assume that the sons of galactic pioneers will always be a glorious conglomerate of virile masters of an alien terrain, fit heirs to a manly tradition of rugged individualism. In this neat blend of sociology and rousing melodrama, J. T. M'Intosh demonstrates that, as isolation changes memory into legend and environment warps a code of manners into a curious etiquette, the frontiersman's descendant may be an odd fish, indeed. To be more precise, a jellyfish. But even a jellyfish has values that are not to be challenged and it should be remembered that one jellyfish is most aptly titled the Portuguese man-of-war.

Beggars All

by J. T. M'INTOSH

'Twas BRILLIG, and the *Slithy Toves* did gyre and gimble in the wabe. At least, that was what it looked like.

What she was actually doing was stopping. Since she had left Earth six months before, the little scout had never once *stopped*. She had gone this way and that, reconnoitred above a dozen worlds light years apart, exchanged messages with a dozen different cultures, and run hell-for-leather from the thirteenth. But each new motion had merely been superimposed on the last until, when she finally went free, it could truly have been said that she was trying to go in a hundred different directions at once.

She was still many light years from Earth. The run in, however, would be straight. It was safer and quicker to shed her surplus momentum in the emptiest of space than to wait until she was in a system packed with planets, satellites and asteroids.

As it was, she ran pretty close to a system which Cope, commander of the *Slithy Toves*, had said was too far away when the scout went free to need to be considered. No one was surprised or blamed Cope. One could only make blind guesses about what any ship was going to do when she went free, whirling through the uncharted spaces.

talked, using ordinary Terran vowels and consonants, was so clearly human that it wasn't worth while seriously considering any other possibility.

"Wonder what language it is," murmured Cope. "Anyone make anything of it?"

"English, fool," said Pretzel. Discipline in the four-man scouts was notorious throughout the Navy. "Shut up and let me hear what he's saying."

Cope listened, but the words made no more sense than before. Certainly a word here and there seemed familiar, but that was all. He could guess a little more from the tone. It was pleading, entreating, begging. Though he could make out no words, Cope knew the whine of the beggar when he heard it.

The voice stopped. Pretzel spoke at once, taking it for granted that she had to interpret, and not in the least surprised that she could do what the others could not. It was principally at such times that Cope wanted to take her by the throat.

"They want help," she said. "All sorts of help. They haven't had any communication with Earth since they left it. At least, they've occasionally picked up fragments of messages from ships, but never been able to reply. They don't know their history, but they know they came from Earth."

"How did you understand them when we didn't?" asked Cope.

She shrugged. "Intelligence," she said.

"Meaning we haven't any?" asked Ann Downing, a slight edge in her voice.

"Didn't you even get the name of the place? Omaruco. That explains everything. Key word. Don't get it yet? Heavens, some people are dumb. America — Omaruco. That was obvious. The consonants are the same, but the vowels have moved round. Some Baccar was talking to us — Sam Becker. I'll tell you the rest of what he said in a minute. Meanwhile, what am I to tell them?"

Cope looked back through the ports thoughtfully and futilely. It wasn't much use looking back the way they had come for a ship that might be pursuing at more than the speed of light. Pretzel interpreted his gaze correctly.

"You don't think the Zone 43 ships are going to chase us back to Earth, surely?" she asked mockingly.

"No," mused Cope. "There's not much use chasing a ship you know can do twice your speed. We'll give them credit for working that out. Yes, I think we should have a look at this Omaruco."

Pretzel visibly dropped her mockery. They had something to decide as commander and second now, and for a moment other relations were put aside, as she directed herself to the problem.

"You don't think we should get right back and report on Zone 43?"

"Whatever's going on there is less important than contacting these people. Besides, you know what'll happen if I've nothing more to report than we have now." His voice took on the peremptory bark of reprimanding top brass. "Why not? Didn't you realize the importance of this? Haven't you learned yet that the purpose of scouts is to bring back information? What's a tinpot local squabble beside the rediscovery of an early colony?"

She nodded and took the microphone. "Kimung un tee loned," she said confidently. "Senning ife nü. Thus untarastung Unglush ive years wul boo dufucilt oonif whan woo soo yce wuthüt fullung tha oothar wuth ut. Bit koop year kile sen gawung fire deracshine."

She grinned at their expressions. "After all," she said, "I'm a recorder. Cracking weird dialects is part of my job." Inevitably the mocking tone came back. She couldn't keep it out for long. "You don't need to feel bad just because I'm terrific at my job—and most other things."

Cope refused to make any sign of having heard this. Pretzel had been such a challenge to him from the moment she joined the *Slithy Toves* that he felt, somehow, he had to be better than she at everything. As usual, he carefully avoided looking for possible reasons.

The scout dropped under the low clouds and the four lieutenants had their first view of an Omarucon city. Sam Becker had called it a city, Pretzel said, but apparently he had been misled by natural pride and not knowing any better. Liddin, a major Omarucon city, was a hundred or so farms stretched from horizon to horizon.

However, there was quite a respectable crowd waiting at the field where the *Slithy Toves* seemed to be expected to land. Ann was at the controls. Cope as commander, Pretzel as recorder, and Bob as armaments officer were naturally at the ports learning all they could about Omaruco. Pretzel was taking photographs and Bob, already rather disdainfully, was checking on possible defenses in case they should have to take overt action at any time against Liddin.

It was an Earth-type planet to ten places, which told a story in itself. The early settlers had gone on and on from system to system, planet to planet, looking for just such a world. That was when settlers still had a sentimental attachment to their own physical specification. They wanted to have nothing to do with worlds where they would adapt themselves to new conditions and cease to be human as they understood the term. They ignored Venus, Mars and the satellites of the outer solar planets for this reason. And thus, before Earth's own system was fully colonized, the search for other Earths had started. Fortunately, among millions of planets there were hundreds of Earths.

Ann brought the ship down neatly, and Cope moved to the airlock. He was germicided, and he was breathing through a thin, almost invisible membrane which would keep germs of one world on one side and of the other on the other. Experience had shown the precautions which were necessary and those which were safeguards against million-to-one shots.

A party of about a dozen people moved to meet Cope and Bob as they dropped the four feet from the airlock. They turned and waited. As they didn't know the male-female setup on Omaruco, it seemed wiser that the first contact should be made by Cope and Bob. So Pretzel had trained them in the Omarucon version of English. It wasn't difficult to speak it and understand it after a little practice. Pretzel warned them, however, that the vowel changes wouldn't be uniform. They would almost certainly find that some words hadn't followed the general rule.

The people were like Liddin — rough, untidy, backward. Once again Cope saw that hard work and healthy conditions didn't necessarily produce the perfect physical specimen. Some of the Omarucons were the idyllic primitive — tall, strong, magnificent — but like most peoples living in backward conditions they were largely scrawny, fat, ugly, hairy, pot-bellied, gap-toothed, awkward and slow.

The lieutenants of the *Slithy Toves*, in the routine way, had made no special effort to create a good impression. They were still in the clothes they had been wearing. But at that, they obviously came from a culture on a higher level than that of the Omarucons.

The Omarucons' spokesman was one of the least attractive of them. He was small and fat and pig-eyed, and he puffed and wheezed unpleasantly as he came up to Cope.

"Greetings," he said. His manner was half defiant, half apologetic. "I'm Sam Becker. You will help us, won't you? We have had no help from Earth since we came here. All you see we built ourselves, or grew. There was no life here when we came, except a little vegetation. We knew Terran civilization was spreading over the galaxy all around us, for we picked up fragments of messages and knew ships were —"

"Hold on," said Cope. He found he could understand the man easily enough if he disregarded the actual sounds he heard and concentrated on the meaning. But the combination of unfamiliarity of language and the unexpected whining appeal for assistance before he had even said a word dazed him a little.

"I'm Randolph Cope," he said, using the Omarucon dialect as far as he could. "I take it you are the descendants of early colonists who —"

"Possibly," interrupted Becker. "No one had any time to write our history. What matters now is —"

"Excuse me. If you want help from us, you must allow us to be the judge of what matters now. Are your problems so immediate and desperate that they must be attended to now — this instant?"

The Omarucons seemed puzzled by this attitude. They stared at each other and murmured among themselves. Cope didn't call them to order. He was reminding himself of two things which were always pertinent whenever the advancing tide of Terran culture caught up with one of these early settlements. The first was that he was dealing with human beings, people who shared his own history, not unknown, inexplicable, unpredictable strangers. The second was that however that might be, it was an established fact that when a group was split off from the rest of humanity, isolated and left to work out its own salvation, it frequently happened that the explanation for strange, inhuman, unconventional behavior that one found in it was so hidden in their past or present way of life that it took months or years to discover it.

There was a colony where the filthiest, most obscene word in the language was *sleep*. People did sleep, of course, but the whole culture was constructed to deny the fact. Husbands and wives had private resting-rooms where they would *rest* (even that word, though not actually obscene, was avoided where possible), but the suggestion that they *slept* in them was full and sufficient grounds for divorce. To the crew of the exploring ship which made the first re-contact with this colony, all this was very puzzling. The explanation which was now accepted was undoubtedly the correct one, but the shortest statement of it was contained in a volume of 372 pages, with many charts and diagrams.

"No," said Becker at last. "But of course — you will, eventually, help us? When I realized I was at last in touch with a Terran ship, and that after all this time we were to join our fellows again, I. . . ."

Cope didn't stop him this time. The begging, entreating tone died to an indeterminate murmur and Cope turned his head to see what all the Omarucons were staring at — though he had a pretty good idea of what it was.

He was right. Pretzel was standing in the airlock. Cope searched among the Omarucons until he found a girl of about twenty, looked from her to Pretzel and back, and understood all.

The Omarucon counterpart of Pretzel was at least 70 per cent as pretty as she was. But the Omarucon girl was none too clean, had a colorless, weatherbeaten face, tangled hair, imperfect teeth, and generally didn't seem to be ready and able to put much into life, or expect to get much out of it. She wore a rough, nondescript jacket over something else that looked even less interesting, and though more of her legs was bare than Pretzel's, who cared?

Pretzel — well. It was like sacking placed beside the purest silk. She had clearly been watching and listening, and had replaced her perfunctory blouse with a white shirt which was not too garrulous about its contents. By Omarucon standards she was probably decent. There was no indication that the Liddins saw anything not quite respectable about her. She was merely dumbfounding.

Sam Becker recovered himself, and though his eyes occasionally strayed back to Pretzel, who had jumped down with a somewhat sensational ballooning of skirt, he went back to his point. He talked about things of which they were in desperate need but didn't say what they were.

"Just what is your most important problem?" asked Cope patiently. Pretzel moved over and stood beside him.

Sam thought hard. "Etus," he said at last. "An illness. Many of us are falling to it. More every year. Have you a doctor?"

Cope nodded at Pretzel. "Your baby," he said. Sam's eyes widened, but he said nothing. Cope turned back to Sam. "We'd like," he went on, "to have a look round, if you don't mind."

Sam didn't mind. He led the way contentedly. These Earth people, apparently, were going to help. That was all that mattered.

There were no real surprises in what they found in Liddin. Such surprises as there were arose because whenever they began to decide the Omarucons were very backward they found evidence that they were not, and vice versa. For example, electric power was everywhere, plenty of it, and yet there was next to no mechanization save lumbering electric trucks. The electricity was used mainly for lighting and heating. Conditions were surprisingly clean and the Omarucons surprisingly dirty.

There was no sign of luxury and even less of real hardship. It wasn't hardship to the Omarucons that there was no meat, for there had never been any animals on Omaruco but men. There had apparently been a certain amount of vegetation, which had largely succumbed to the more virile plants of Earth. The idea of eating the flesh of living creatures was slightly repugnant to the Liddinars but not really very interesting.

As the recorder, Pretzel had to find out things and report on them. Her responsibility was more to Terran Navy HQ than to Cope. He could, of course, ask her to report to him if he thought she had information which would be valuable to him as commander. But the strain and rivalry between them being what it was, Cope tended to ask her, and she to report, as little as possible.

Certain things about Omaruco and the Omarucons were clear. They used no money, which at once suggested a barter system. But there was

hardly any barter either. There was no government. Certain local councils would meet to decide what to do about things. They had no authority, however, except what they decided to take. All in all, the system, whatever it amounted to, seemed to work.

The *Slitly Toves* had landed at a busy time. The Omarucon climate was like Earth's except that seasonal changes were very abrupt, and the summer, which would come almost overnight, was due. Almost all the Liddinars were farmers. They had to be. The soil of Omaruco would grow crops but reluctantly. Each farmer could produce enough for himself and only a little over. The scout arrived in the middle of the inevitable last minute rush to complete the sowing.

Some arrangement had been made whereby Sam Becker, who had no official position in the community except that he happened to be the man who operated Liddin's only radio, could be left more or less free to look after the four Terrans. They stayed at his farm, put their questions to him, and had little to do with other Liddinars as individuals. That didn't matter. Sam seemed to be typical.

It became more obvious every minute that the Omarucons were a race of beggars. They begged without apparent loss of pride. Cope discovered something he had not known before — pride was dependent entirely on the individual's own idea of himself. If he didn't think he was lowering himself by begging for something, he wasn't.

The limitations of Ann and Bob Best were soon apparent. They were good at their job, of course. That went without saying. But both proved entirely incapable of extrapolation. For all practical purposes Cope and Pretzel were alone on Omaruco in their dealings with the Liddinars. (The fact that they called themselves Liddinars suggested that Liddin was a corruption of London. The idea of London being the most important city in America amused Pretzel and therefore slightly irritated Cope.)

No, Ann and Bob could be told to do things, but that was all. Left on their own they didn't even interest the Omarucons much. The Liddinars wanted Cope and Pretzel, with an instinctive realization of the people who counted in the small Terran group.

Cope had left the problem of the Omarucon disease entirely to Pretzel. She wasn't a doctor, but she was the nearest they had. She had commandeered a large farmhouse as a hospital. The idea was new to the Omarucons, but they gave no trouble.

Cope wandered among the beds on the third morning, with Sam as guide, and found Pretzel giving injections. "How goes it?" he asked.

She straightened up. She didn't speak until they were in her office.

"Nothing in this," she said with confidence which might be assumed for Sam's benefit, but which Cope had to admit was impressive. "It's finished, in fact. Cures in every case and I can guarantee them in future."

Cope waited and Sam's pot-belly shook eagerly.

"Etus," she said, "is merely the ending -itis, meaning the Omarucons didn't know what it was. But it was easy enough to crack. Like most early colonists, they hated and have continued to hate the idea of changing physically. It's been built into a psychological block. They *won't* change physically. But after all, there are bound to be differences eventually in a race that settles on a new planet, with slightly altered conditions, traces of different chemical structure, and so on. And, of course, the Omarucons are all vegetarians.

"These things have been working to modify the Omarucons slightly, and their determination not to change has been working against them. So in some extreme cases they became ill. Naturally there would be more and more cases as time went by. But all that's necessary is to draw up a list of the chemical influences of Omarucon conditions and how to counteract them, and that's what I've been doing."

Sam didn't understand all this, obviously, but he did understand that the problem was solved. He lost interest.

"Now," he said, "there's the problem of . . ."

"Just a minute," said Cope curiously. "Is that all you have to say?"

Clearly Sam didn't know what else there could be to say. Then, after profound and visible cogitation, he came up with something.

"Sorry," he said. "Thank you. Now there is the problem. . . ."

"Let's get to the bottom of this," said Cope. "Didn't you care about this thing, after all?"

Sam didn't understand. "Care? Naturally we cared. But it is over, isn't it? Didn't Lieutenant Fisher say . . ."

"Isn't there such a thing," asked Cope ironically, "as gratitude?"

Sam considered that carefully. He obviously didn't understand them, but that was a common occurrence and caused him no surprise. He wasn't unwilling to cooperate — he merely found it difficult.

"I don't know the word," he said at last.

"Groetfeel," said Pretzel, becoming interested. "Don't you have that word? Or anything like it?"

They tried him with all the synonyms they could think of. Some of them he knew. But then it was other meanings which were familiar. The idea of gratitude was wholly missing from the Omarucon language.

The conversation irked Sam a little. Though some of his work was being done for him, he still had a lot to do. He wanted to do it. They let him go.

"Any ideas on this?" Cope asked, perhaps a little unguardedly.

"Any I have," said Pretzel, "would be mere theories." She gave him a look of impossible innocence. "After all, my only responsibility is to record facts."

"Since when were you afraid of responsibility?"

"Since when," she asked mildly, "did you want to give it away?"

Perforce, Cope left it at that.

The Omarucons were good at one thing — finding work for idle hands. They worked hard themselves and they didn't see that any other way of life was possible. Sam begged Cope to instruct him in radio. To send Ann to have a look at the generating station, which was underground; nearly all Omarucon power was hydro-electric, and nearly all the water was underground. To have Bob tell them a little about defense, of which they had none. To help them with their crops, their health, their communications, their obstetrics, their social problems, their storage, their few machines — everything in sight and a few things from further away than that. This, apparently, was the help they needed.

And Cope did almost everything that was asked. He needed facts. He was getting them, but they only crystallized the questions.

What made the Omarucons tick? Why had they never had wars? How did they get on without government? Who had taught them to beg? Why had they no history?

At last he knew he must have most of the facts at his fingertips and still no real understanding.

Then, five days after they landed, the summer came. One day it was merely not very cold. The next, it was hot. The Liddinars worked as hard as ever. Now their task was to operate and supervise the simple pumps which brought water from underground, regulate the flow and direct it where it would do most good. Cope was kept busy solving problems for the Omarucons, telling Ann and Bob what to do, improving Sam's radio, explaining things, showing the Liddinars new, better and quicker methods of doing the same things. In fact, he found himself busier than ever.

But not Pretzel. She had been left free most of the time so that she could prepare and complete her various reports. For a time she had been busy, even apart from her work as the scout's medical officer. Now she had things moving smoothly, relaxed, left everything possible to Liddinars she had given some training, and spent most of her time sun bathing on the hill behind Sam's farm. Her whole attitude said she was giving herself a well-earned rest.

Cope, still working hard, was naturally irritated. Maybe she had done a

good job. Maybe she regarded it as concluded. Maybe he had no right to interfere. But. . . .

If Pretzel felt she knew all there was to know about the Omarucons, couldn't she let him in on it? All right, so he was dumb. So he didn't see what was so obvious to her. So he would appreciate a little information.

He swallowed his pride and hammered down the lid on his resentment.

He still hesitated before joining Pretzel. After all, she was entitled to a little privacy if she wanted it. She was sun bathing, as ever, on the little hill behind the farm, and from her outfit, or lack of it, there was a distinct possibility that she was taking it for granted she would be left alone. After all, Pretzel was never cheap. Very likely her state of undress was meant to be a sign, "Please do not disturb."

It was. When Cope barged up the hill, Pretzel sat up and unhurriedly but pointedly put on her blouse and fastened her shorts in a silence full of meaning.

"Sorry," Cope sighed. "I'll go in just a minute. But look here. Isn't there anything you'd like to tell me?" He made an effort and forced himself to say: "You seem to see things that I don't. How about sharing some of them with me?"

Pretzel lay back again, and Cope was amazed and shocked by a sudden, almost irresistible impulse to drop beside her and find out how she felt in his arms.

"It all revolves around one little thing," she said absently. "Remember when we found Sam didn't know what gratitude was? That surprised me — didn't it surprise you?"

"Sure," said Cope. "A race of beggars with no gratitude. You go down on your knees for a thing, though you expect to get it, and if you don't you ask for something else. You humble yourself asking for things, take them for granted when you get them, and don't feel any gratitude. I don't understand it. Do you?"

"I thought about it then," said Pretzel lazily, her eyes closed, "and then began to see things. A ship, 500 years ago. A long, long time in space. A landing — probably the hundredth or so. A world that had to do, because only a few more trips and landings could be made, and this world was a better bet than anything likely to be found if they went on. A good world, but a hard world. A world where it wasn't easy to get a livelihood, and where it didn't get any easier. A settlement where people knew less and less as they forgot and died and had to break up their ship to make things they needed *now*, and. . . ."

She stopped and opened one eye to look at Cope. "I may be wrong about

all this," she said, with a return of her old mockery. "Wouldn't it be better for you to reach your own conclusions and check them against mine?"

She was still annoyed at being disturbed, Cope thought.

"Look," he said, his voice carefully controlled. "This is the seventh day we've been here. There's still the matter of Zone 43 to report. That means we can't stay. We should go now, if we're satisfied we have something to tell HQ about Omaruco. Have we?"

"Naturally," she said. "Haven't you?"

He made up his mind. "We're going," he said coldly. "In a few hours."

"That's all right," she said and closed her eyes again.

An insidious thought crept into his mind in the middle of his anger. It would be nice to be loved by a girl like Pretzel. His anger evaporated and for once he was honest with himself about her. She wasn't really hard. At first, suspicious of her beauty, he had been brusque and a little unfair towards her. When he knew better, it was too late. She had set up the powerful defenses that so many intelligent, beautiful women learned to use — irony, so that he never really touched her; carelessness, so that it didn't seem to matter if he did; efficiency, so that he was always at a disadvantage.

She had won the encounter hands down. They had had a tacit contest to see who could care less about the other, and he had always been a bad second.

He wasn't aware she had opened her eyes until she had had plenty of time to see the brooding, self-accusatory look in his eyes.

"Is it as bad as that?" she asked softly.

He jumped to his feet violently. He knew that perhaps she had dropped some of her defenses. But he also knew with what effect she could strike if he gave himself away further, and if she wanted to.

He was glad to see Sam come up the hill from his ramshackle radio installation in an outhouse. The radio was a little less ramshackle and much more effective now, and Sam had even shown signs of understanding what Cope had done to it. The Omarucons weren't stupid.

Pretzel sat up abruptly when they saw that Sam was trying to run. There were two others with him, two farmers whom they knew only as Wallace and Charlie.

It was the first time they had seen Sam agitated. He looked more human, somehow. They were seeing him really concerned about something now, which he had never been when he was merely begging for something he said his people desperately needed.

"The Zone 43 ships followed you," he gasped. "They are over Porus now. We're in trouble."

"What the hell," said Cope distinctly, "do you know about Zone 43?" There had been no mention of it from them.

"They told the station at Porus who they were and why they were there. They took a while to understand our dialect, but in the end they worked it out. They want you. They say they have no quarrel with us, but you must be turned over to them. If not, for a start, they will destroy Porus."

"So," said Cope grimly. "We've done a few things for you in the last week. Helped you on about a hundred years, I suppose. So it's just as well, in the circumstances, that you told us you didn't know the meaning of gratitude."

Sam danced in his impatience. "What does that matter now? You talk about words I don't understand when Omaruco may be blasted to fragments. They can do what they threaten, these Zone 43 ships. They have destroyed a mountain."

"Oh, they could do that," Cope agreed. "Also blow Porus, wherever or whatever that is, to its constituent atoms."

"What are we to do?"

Cope sighed. The responsibility was his. He should have known somehow, using second sight if necessary, that the Zone 43 conflict was so important to Zone 43 that they would have to follow the scout and destroy it if possible so that no news would reach Earth until they were ready. Now he was caught with his pants down. It was failure and it was all his. When the facts were known, if they ever were, he would get no medals. Events found him guilty.

"Oh, it's obvious enough," he said. "We go out and fight them. Or make a run for it."

"What are the chances?" asked Charlie.

"Nil," said Cope briefly. "A good big 'un will always beat a good little 'un. We can handle anything our own size. But there will be at least three big Zone 43 ships. . . ."

"Five," said Sam.

"Then I can tell the future even more clearly. We go out and that's the end of us. But they may leave you alone."

He doubted that. If Zone 43 was ready to destroy a Terran Navy ship to keep its secrets, it wouldn't be likely to balk at razing a newly discovered colony afterwards, to make sure. But he could see no useful purpose in telling Sam that. As for running for it, the Zone 43 ships, if they knew their business at all, were bound to be able to detect them and win the battle of acceleration. The *Slithy Toves* would start with the handicap of Omaruco's gravity, and the Zone 43 ships would be free. Five of them, too — one could hardly guard a fast, agile scout, but five. . . .

"Then we must fight," said Sam. He was more composed now. He looked at Wallace and Charlie and they nodded.

Pretzel also nodded calmly, as if to show that she had expected this. Cope couldn't help his mouth dropping open. Fight? How could they fight? They were almost weaponless. . . .

"Your weapons, I suppose, can be stepped up by our power," observed Sam thoughtfully. "We must make our preparations and then induce the ships to come here and let us bring them down." Wallace and Charlie nodded again, in full agreement with this simple statement of the position.

Cope worked it out. Yes, with Omarucon power, they might do something, at that. The main limitation of a ship like the *Slithy Toves* was not the armament she could carry, but the power there was to operate it. With unlimited power — why, with unlimited power there was more than a chance. The Zone 43 ships, after all, were only units, unable to draw on the power of a world. The armament of the scout, overloaded with all they could pour into it, was greater, in theory, than anything any half dozen ships could carry.

"Right," he said briefly. "Let's get busy."

As the Zone 43 cruisers came over the hill four hours later, Cope was conscious that all that could have been done in the time had been done. Liddin had been evacuated. The scout ship was still in plain sight, and the Zone 43 ships might destroy it. That would be a disaster in its way — Omaruco had been isolated for centuries and Cope didn't want to spend the rest of his life there. But on the other hand, with the technical knowledge of his crew something might be done — and anyway, that wasn't the problem of the moment.

It was a great battle. When the first ship was destroyed, Sam and Wallace and Charlie thought it was easy. They saw a Bob Best they had not known existed, cold and competent, every atom of attention on his job. They saw him do things to the equipment mounted in Sam's farmhouse yard and there was a faint crackle in the air as if it was being torn asunder. As a matter of fact it was. They saw the first ship's screens flare dull red, then orange, then white, and then suddenly its bare hull was black and helpless, falling to smash with an ear-splitting crash and sudden blinding brilliance.

Cope had hoped that one would be enough. There was always the possibility that the Zone 43 cruisers were looking for an easy prey, and might be driven off far enough to enable the scout to escape — without her weapons, but that was a detail. He had left a recorded message for Sam to broadcast, promising dire retribution if Omaruco was harmed. This threat would really mean something if the scout escaped.

But apparently no such thoughts were present in the Zone 43 commander's mind. Ship number two dove in, direct for the scout. The plan was obvious. It was the ship that mattered. If it could be destroyed, Zone 43 would have time, even if Cope and his crew were left unharmed on Omaruco. But so long as the *Slithy Toves* existed, so did the danger to Zone 43. It was becoming obvious that Manta, Commerline and Atacta must have dreams of galactic conquest. Their own battle, presumably, was against their own moderates.

But that was another thing Cope couldn't allow himself to think about at the moment. He was not actually engaged in the attack, which was Bob's affair, but he had to be ready in case he was needed.

He didn't have to give any orders about the second ship. Destroying it was not enough. It was a battering ram which was quite capable of wrecking the scout even though it died in the effort. Bob had to blast it out of space. He did it, with some help from Ann, who was on the other beam. But only just. They saw fragments of the ship spatter the scout. That wouldn't do any damage. Some of its screens had been left, though all its armament had been removed to Sam's farm.

If there had been more time, Cope would have had the ship removed under cover and a dummy set up. But they had no time for small refinements like that. If they had tried, they might have left themselves open to such an attack that the Zone 43 ships could have razed the whole of the planet to make sure that they had destroyed the scout.

The remaining three cruisers withdrew out of range, and an exploratory beam came down from the nearest. It wasn't much of a beam. The ship was so far away that even the overloaded Terran equipment couldn't do much against it. But nevertheless it was very effective against the defenseless farms of Liddin. The buildings shrunk to skeletons, and the fields blackened. Bob moved at his beam, but a word from Cope stopped him.

"No use doing anything about that," he said. "They're only trying to find out where we are by a process of elimination. They want to find out what isn't defended. They know we'll be able to handle a beam like that. Sam, this farm has to go too."

Sam nodded. If it disturbed him at all, he gave no sign of it.

In a few minutes everything about them was blackened ruin. Bob had done nothing but defend his own equipment and the people standing about it. The farm itself was allowed to collapse. There would be nothing to show the Zone 43 ships that they had found the attacking base and moved on.

They realized this when they had destroyed every farm in the valley. Then they moved in. They were asking for destruction, and they knew it, but there was nothing else they could do.

"Pretzel, take over," said Cope. He opened his mouth again to add further instructions, but changed his mind. If Pretzel was going to take charge, she might as well be free. "I'm going to talk to them," he said instead. There was no need to explain further. The radio, which wasn't a weapon, had been left in the scout. If he wanted to communicate, he had to do it from there.

Pretzel merely nodded. Very likely he would die in the scout. The chances were that the Zone 43 ships would get it in the end. But if they did, it didn't matter much whether Cope was inside it or not.

He ran for the scout, keeping under cover as far as possible. But that was another thing that didn't really matter. The attackers wouldn't want to destroy the ship any more, or any less, with him inside it than they did now.

He reached it safely, and wasted no time in getting to the radio. "Zone 43. Zone 43," he called.

The reply came in at once. "Well?"

"You can do nothing against us here," he said flatly.

"Then why tell us?"

"Because I wish as little harm to this world as possible. You know it will do you no good to go and destroy the rest of the world, and it won't affect our actions. But we don't want it to happen. You may as well let us go to Earth."

"In fact, you have nothing to say."

"I've said it."

"It couldn't be the case, could it, that if we were to destroy the rest of this world your power would stop and you would be helpless?"

"No," said Cope indifferently. "There is no link-up of power here. Destroy other places and it would make no difference, for we have been unable to draw on their power anyway. We have all we need here."

That was almost true. The ships could not cut off the power Cope had at his disposal without overcoming the Terran resistance, and that could only be done by exhausting the power. But it wasn't true that Cope had all he needed. The Omarucons had a lot of electricity, but it couldn't stand much more of the terrific drain on it.

"You cannot stop us getting back to Earth," Cope insisted. "I'm not talking about that. I'm concerned merely about this world."

"Which doesn't interest us at all. If that is all you have to say. . . ."

Communication was cut.

Cope watched the next act, helpless. Two cruisers swung back into space, built up velocity, and came at the scout from opposite directions. One couldn't but admire the devotion to duty of the Zone 43 ships. Each of

them contained at least 50 men. They were being sacrificed without the slightest hesitation because their job was nothing more or less than the destruction of the *Slithy Toves*.

There could be no finesse in what Pretzel did about it. There were only two beams. If the attackers had known that they would certainly have thrown in all three to batter the scout to ruin, and would almost certainly have succeeded. But they probably thought there was only one. And this maneuver left one ship. It wasn't the last effort.

Realizing that he had done all he could at the radio, when the attackers' attitude was as single-minded as it was, Cope started back for Sam's farm. The attackers had all their armament directed at the scout, of course, but power such as the Zone 43 ships couldn't match was being poured into the scout's remaining screens by remote control from the farm.

On the way he stopped, chilled by what he could see. Pretzel and Bob and Ann weren't quite going to destroy the two ships before they destroyed the scout. But Pretzel apparently realized that too. Both beams concentrated on one ship, and whenever it veered, clawed from its course by boiling air, the beams at once switched to the other ship. Until they crashed neither was entirely disabled. But both missed the scout.

Cope completed the dash to the farm. A glance at Sam told the story, though his crew was unperturbed.

"We're just about through," said Pretzel. "In simple language, if that last ship tries the same thing, we can't stop it."

"More power?" Cope snapped at Sam.

"Impossible. Can we move your equipment? We could use the Ketrin lines only nine miles from here."

Cope had been told that already and it was no answer. The remaining ship would be watching. The Liddinars had only slow electric trucks. They would never be allowed to do those nine miles.

He could have stalled for longer before letting the Zone 43 ships know where they were. He could have had the *Slithy Toves* under cover, and a power line to Ketrin.

But he had given away the scout's position when they could no longer prevent the attackers destroying Porus as a gesture. Cope was no field marshal, balancing so many lives against such a loss or such a gain. Besides, he didn't regard Omarucon lives as his to buy and sell.

Ann interrupted his thoughts. "I did quite a job on those generators," she said eagerly. For once the chip on her shoulder didn't show. "They're fully automatic now, and there's a terrific charge when power is low, down to a trickle when it's high. Give them an hour or two and there'll be enough power again to handle this last ship."

"How long?" demanded Cope.

Ann frowned. "Trouble with these beams is that they can't scrape up the last dregs of power — they need a good kick. Three hours, I'd say."

"Let me take a truck and go over towards Ketrin," said Sam. "That will occupy this ship for a while. Then. . . ."

Cope and Pretzel looked at Sam, and at each other. The funny thing was that he couldn't help begging even when he was asking him to let him throw away his life. They had decided independently, days ago, that Sam was all right. But this was the first time they could look at him and really like what they saw.

"The idea's good," said Pretzel, "but let's refine on it a bit, shall we? First, it's my job, Sam, not yours. The way we work, the second in command gets all this sort of dirty work. In the second place, I'll take one of the small screens on the truck so that I won't exactly be a pushover."

She caught Cope's eye. "Any comments?"

"Yes," he retorted. "God knows I don't want to be a hero like you noble characters. But you're the recorder, Pretzel, and if anyone gets back to Earth it has to be you. Looks as if I'll have to drive that truck."

They naturally left it as long as possible. If the Zone 43 ship was prepared to wait, nothing suited them better. But the purpose of the plan was to save power, and it would fail if the beams and screens had to be used again before the power built itself up.

They loaded all the batteries they could find on one of the electric trucks. It was blackened and twisted by the beam which had licked the whole of Liddin, but still usable. Cope, who had no intention of dying if he could help it, seriously considered the possibility of setting it going without a driver. That, however, was impracticable until the road to Ketrin, a mile away, was reached. The truck had to be driven through gates and along lanes to reach it. But once he had the truck pointed along the long straight road, he was perfectly prepared to leave it if he got the chance.

When they saw the ship drop low, far across the plain, they hoped for a moment that a land attack was going to be tried. Fifty men would only be committing suicide by advancing into range of the scout's beams. But then they saw the ship was creeping slowly towards them in the apparent hope that the beams could not be turned low.

They could, of course, but Cope didn't want the beams to be used at all. He jumped on the truck.

"So long, hero," said Pretzel. He said nothing. She might have found a few more tender last words to say to him, he thought.

The Zone 43 ship soon saw the moving truck and rose again, still keeping

well away. Now they knew where the Terran base probably was. Cope began to see advantages in the scheme he hadn't quite expected. For quite a while the ship seemed to think this new move was a trap, and watched without doing anything.

Cope found himself glancing at his watch every two or three minutes. Three hours, Ann had said. Half an hour had passed when the truck started. Another half hour, the incredibly slow trolley had almost reached the road, and the ship was still well clear, waiting.

But just as Cope saw that 67 of the 180 minutes had passed, the ship began to move closer. Anything that happened now would be tentative, until either side saw the possibility of victory in a last all-out attack. The single cruiser from Zone 43 had to be wary. The commander might guess that Cope's resources were dwindling, but still couldn't afford to take chances.

The first probing beam touched the truck. Cope's screen was on; there was a crackle, no more. But the screen, powered only by the Omarucon batteries, could take pitifully little of this.

Cope swung out on the road. It wasn't a good road, but at least it was straight. The beam sought the truck again, and Cope considered his chances. Luck had been with him up to now, in that the Zone 43 commander didn't dare do much. But now the commander would see that there was no answering attack, and his confidence would build up. Soon he would come nearer and turn full power on the truck.

There were hedges at the roadside — no protection, but good cover. Cope looked at his watch again. Seventy-three minutes.

The Zone 43 commander swept away to come at the truck along the road. He knew where the defending base was, and he wanted to keep well out of its way. Cope seized his chance. He turned the truck in as close to the hedge as possible, set it straight, and then when the chance occurred he dropped over the side of the truck and rolled under the bush. The truck rumbled on, slower than a man could walk.

Thereafter he could watch what was going on with more satisfaction. He could smile as the ship gingerly approached the truck and again tried a cautious beam. The road ten yards from Cope glowed faintly, but the next time he would be quite safe. The truck rolled on indifferently. Eighty-one minutes. He began to work his way along the hedge back to Sam's farm.

At 113 minutes the truck fell in tangled ruin, after having limped on gallantly long after Cope would have been dead if he had stayed in it. He had timed his return well. He got back to the yard just as the four men and two women there saw the truck, far away along the Kettrin road,

collapse into black wreckage. He saw tears in Sam's eyes, which was interesting, but none in Pretzel's. In fact, she looked indecently jubilant.

"How about it, Ann?" he said, and everyone wheeled to stare at him. He didn't quite know how to take the fact that only Pretzel wasn't surprised or pleased to see him. Apparently she had seen or guessed what had happened. "Nearly two hours," he went on coolly. "What are the chances now?"

They all rapidly adjusted themselves to the idea that he wasn't dead after all, except Pretzel, who didn't have to.

Ann looked almost happy. "Pretty good," she said. "Of course, I can't test the power. But we may be able to bring that ship down like the others, if we get the chance."

"We'll get the chance," Cope assured her.

"Why?" asked Bob. "If I were the Zone 43 commander, I'd orbit about the planet, getting up some velocity so that I could catch the scout whenever she tried to leave."

Cope didn't have to answer that. "Then you'd lose her," said Pretzel. "That was all right when he had five ships. Now there's only one, and however and wherever he orbits, we can calculate the precise split second and exactly the right direction to take off so that we get hours of acceleration before he can follow. No, he muddled the whole thing. He should have kept us where we are with his five ships."

Cope grinned. "I wouldn't have liked to try it," he said. "I think he was right enough — only he failed, that's all. At least, I hope he failed."

He had. Knowing that the scout could slip away from one ship almost whenever she wished, the Zone 43 cruiser came in for one last flaming, all-out attack on the scout — just three hours and 27 minutes too late.

Ann had done a good job on the generators. The last ship flared through the bright colors of disintegration as rapidly as the first had done, and all that the five cruisers from Zone 43 had accomplished was the destruction of Liddin's farmhouses.

"You are really going?" asked Sam. "Nothing will make you change your minds?"

Cope shook his head. "But we'll be back," he said, "or others like us. Probably us. Zone 43 isn't our job, after we've reported." For a moment he thought dazedly of the joy of reporting that the *Slithy Toves* had destroyed five enemy cruisers.

Sam put his hand in his pocket. "Take these with you," he said. "As a personal gift. I don't know the laws of your Navy, but if we have to sign something to make it legal for us to give you things personally, draw it up

and we'll sign. No? We'd be obliged if you make it clear to your Navy and the rest of your world that these are as valuable and as difficult to get on Omaruco as on Earth, so there's no use starting a diamond rush. Also, that we're not going to give them away to anyone who comes and asks for them."

He left Pretzel and Cope staring at four magnificent stones. "We could have cut them," said Sam over his shoulder, "but you will certainly be able to get it done better." Deliberately, standing no nonsense, he walked back to a corner of the field.

"No gratitude, huh," said Cope.

Pretzel got her breath back. "No," she insisted. "It isn't gratitude. It isn't payment. They asked us to help, and we did. When the Zone 43 cruisers came, you did all you could to keep Omaruco safe. They knew what you could have done, and what you did. They heard on their radios what you said to the cruisers, and worked out what it meant. But this still isn't gratitude."

"Then how the hell do their minds work?"

"Let's get off the ground and I'll tell you."

The *Slithy Toves* was on a straight run to Earth. There was nothing to do for weeks now except eat, talk, sleep or read.

"What you need," said Pretzel, "to understand the Omarucons is imagination."

"Which we haven't got?" demanded Ann.

"We'll see. If you have, use it." She rose abruptly and switched out the lights. The cabin was illuminated only very faintly by the starlight from the ports.

"The four of us," came her voice in the darkness, "are landing on a new world. With a lot of other people. Our ship is useless — not damaged, just worn out. We'll never be able to make it really serviceable again — at least, not for centuries and then only if the civilization we build takes a technological turn. We have tools, but this job needs the help of a score of specialist factories.

"So we're here to stay. But things aren't easy. We have to live for a long time on our stores while we try to get things to grow.

"And another thing. We always thought there would be a government. We thought governments just grew. Now we find they don't when everyone's busy nearly all the time. Some people think they'd like to govern, and maybe even try, but they soon find they fall behind with producing things for their own use, and others have none to spare. So they decide they'd rather live than govern."

"Could it be as simple as that?" Cope wondered.

"Perhaps not. Look at it from another angle. Who is our natural leader? You — you commanded the ship. But you commanded it for a long time, and you don't want to give orders any more. You want to settle like everyone else and own things and make things grow. That's not the only way *you* can exist, but it's the only way you can leave anything for your kids, when you have any."

Cope grunted. Pretzel's teeth flashed faintly in the darkness and they heard the laugh in her voice.

"I'm coming to that in a minute. Now, what happens when the only food on a world is what you can grow yourself, and each individual can only produce enough for about one point two people? The tendency is for farmers to be independent, not to trust anyone else too much, never taking in a weak partner who's a liability. So each family has a farm of its own. And it needs help — often. So how do we manage? We get two or three neighbors in to help, and then go and help them in return."

"That's it," said Cope. "Quid pro quo. Gratitude. You helped me, now I'll help you. Just what we'd expect. How does it come about that nobody feels any gratitude, and no one understands the idea of quid pro quo?"

"I keep telling you to use your imagination," said Pretzel plaintively. "You've got a farm. The harvest is completely beyond you. You need help, or you'll never get it in. And there's no money, so you can't pay anyone to help. You won't have enough over to pay in produce. No one has any time for government yet, they're too busy just trying to live, so there's no government, no currency, and no system of barter — because everyone, just at first, wants the same things.

"So what can you do but beg help? At first you do it with promises. You tell me if I help you you'll do the same for me.

"But then, when the time comes, maybe you can't. You're too busy, but Bob's free. So he helps me. Next year you come to me for help again, and I say, 'Oh, no, you didn't pay me back last year. Nothing doing.' You've got to have help, so you go down on your knees for it. But you're not so keen on making promises you may not be able to keep. Promises are two-edged things. Gradually we reach an understanding without many definite promises.

"It becomes formal. When you need help, which is often, you go around begging for it. You don't make any promises. When people do help, you don't feel grateful. People don't really feel grateful for something they've got to have, and expect to get. Gratitude belongs in a leisured, many-faceted civilization where all men are not equal — where some have more, or *are* more, than others."

"Wait till I get that straight," Cope interrupted. "You've got something there. Do you ever feel grateful to someone who's on the same level as yourself? No, you don't. You're glad they did whatever it was, and you like them for doing it. If you feel gratitude, you're admitting inferiority. Admitting you've got to do something to be level with them again. Whether you ever actually do it or not."

"That's it," agreed Pretzel. "On Omaruco, when someone comes to ask your help, you don't feel inferior or superior to him, but remember you're dependent on him and others like him. You can't afford to say too often, 'No, try Pretzel Fisher over the hill. Or Bob Best down in the valley. I haven't the time.'"

"A system works itself out. One or two people try to fit new things into it. You, Ann, don't want to run a farm. You think you can do better by offering assistance in return for so much grain. And that's all right until there's a bad year when the work still has to be done and everyone needs everything he's got. That year you're told politely that we're sorry, but we have to use help we don't have to pay for except in kind. Then, of course, you're stuck.

"This is necessary for so long that by the time it isn't necessary it's established. There comes a time when people are free to think about things like government and currency and specialization and so on. But by this time they've got on for so long as they were that they aren't very interested."

It was all clear enough now, and Cope said so. "What made it difficult to understand," he observed, "was the fact that the Omarucons, who can't say ten words without going down on their knees to beg for something, are actually the most independent race that we have so far discovered in the galaxy."

"It's just the way they do things," said Pretzel. "For example, you finally decide it's time you got married. You've taken a long time to make up your mind about this. But when you do, it's obvious that Pretzel Fisher is the best-looking, most competent, most intelligent, in every way the most attractive female for miles around. So you go to her and beg. You don't know any other way to handle the situation. You want her, but it doesn't occur to you simply to ask if she feels the same way. You tell her how marvellous she is, and how much you need her, and how you can't do without her —"

Cope jerked to his feet to switch on the lights, but didn't. He didn't want Pretzel to see his face.

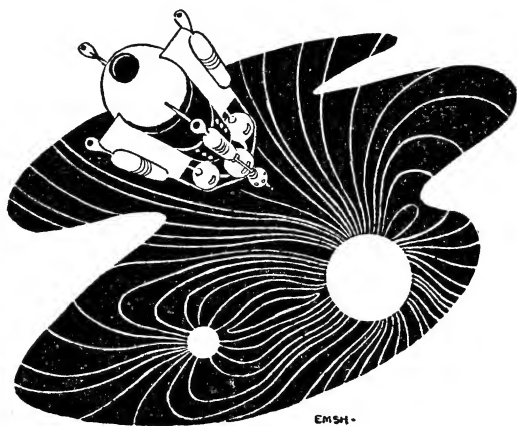
"You've been pretty hard and cruel once or twice before, Pretzel," he said furiously, "but never quite like this. You've won your battle, damn

it. What do you want me to do now — apologize for breathing the same air as you? Okay, so you can make a fool of me any time you like. That doesn't mean you can —"

"It's not me," said Pretzel gently, "making a fool of you this time. What was it I said? You want her — that's right, isn't it, or am I making a fool of myself this time — but it doesn't occur to you simply to ask if she feels the same way. . . ."

Some time later Cope suddenly asked, "Ann and Bob, are you two still here?"

"In this light," came Ann's resentful voice, "it doesn't really matter, does it?"



Far too few characters in fiction are motivated by selfless considerations, by the pure and abstract desire to help one's fellow man along life's thorny path. It is small wonder that the man in the street callously passes by his brother in the gutter when little or none of his secular reading offers him any example of disinterested helpfulness to emulate. It is an especial pleasure, therefore, to bring you the first chronicle of Dr. Aesop Abercrombie, in which Esther Carlson relates, in her uniquely pleasing prose, how the good Doctor, like a kindly destiny, shaped the rough-hewn end of a singularly unfortunate young man.

Heads You Win . . .

by ESTHER CARLSON

DR. AESOP ABERCROMBIE, whose daily health column appears in 1000 newspapers, received the following letter:

Dear Dr. Abercrombie,

My problem is, I have a tail. It is long and bushy. It really has not bothered me much. I am used to it. Usually I wear my trousers hind to fore and keep my tail in my pocket. Now I have joined the Y.M.C.A. and all the fellows stare at me. Do you think I should have an operation and if so, who does this kind of operation?

Sincerely yours,
Perplexed

Without hesitation, Dr. Abercrombie gave the syndicated help:

My dear Perplexed,

Yours is a unique problem, but by no means unheard of in our animal kingdom. As I understand it, you wish to have your tail removed by surgical means; however I feel you would be making a grave mistake. My advice to you is: Be proud you are different! Make the most of your unique endowment! Forget your embarrassment and relax, content in the knowledge that you have more than your fellow man.

Dr. Aesop Abercrombie

P.S. Should you still be determined to go through with an operation, I advise consulting your local veterinary.

Roland Feeney read this encouraging answer in Tuesday's *Daily Forthright*. He hastened to his dingy furnished room, stripped, and looked at himself in the mirror of the sagging bureau. There it was, a red-gold shaggy tail, very much like a collie's. Roland tried to overcome the chagrin he always felt at this sight for he had tried, for several months now, to grow a mustache and was unable to raise even a scraggy row of hairs.

"There you are!" he said, addressing the tail, which drooped rather limply over the footboard of the bed.

Then, in a brighter tone: "Make the most of you!" And after musing over the special attributes of his extended vertebrae for several minutes, he clothed himself once more and betook himself to an establishment on 42d Street.

"I'm a freak," he announced to the manager of Happy Harry's Horror House.

"Oh yeah?" the manager said, who was tiny, embittered and an albino. "Where's your other head?"

"No head," Roland answered. "A tail."

"Oh yeah?" the manager said. "Let's see."

Obligingly, Roland drew his tail from his back pocket and the manager gazed at it for some time with his pink eyes. Then he said:

"Nah."

"No?" cried Roland. He had so built up his hopes. "Tell me why!"

The manager had turned away but some spark of human kindness still flared in his shriveled chest.

"Listen kid," he said. "Two heads, OK. Three heads, nice. But a tail . . . nah. So what will the yokels say? 'Prove it grew on him,' they'll say. 'OK,' I say; 'take off your pants, Dog Boy,' and then what happens? The cops close the joint. Lewd and lascivious."

Downcast, Roland departed and tried next a famous anthropological museum up the street.

"I," Roland said to the director, who was large and bald and blue-veined, "have a tail."

"Do you have it on you?" said the director.

"Yes," said Roland.

"Indeed?" said the director.

"Maybe I'm a missing link," Roland said hopefully.

"If you don't mind," said the director, calling in his colleagues. "Let's have a look at it."

Roland was laid on a marble slab under a fluorescent light while the experts poked, pried, measured, whispered, took notes, and ate sandwiches, for it was lunchtime.

Finally Roland was told to put on his clothes and take his former chair in the director's office. This he did and waited there with bated breath, wondering what sort of fame and glory might be in store for him.

The director reappeared and dropped into his creaking swivel chair. He picked his nose and looked out of the window for some time without speaking. Then he said:

"Mr. Feeney, you are a great disappointment."

Roland's heart plunged to his garters.

"You," went on the director, scratching his stomach, "are no more of a missing link than I am. You are a perfectly normal young man with a tail."

"Oh," Roland cried. "Then I am of no use to you at all?"

"I wouldn't say that," said the director kindly, without suppressing a belch. "We could stuff you and put you with the minor curiosities in the east basement, but you would be distinctly minor. Distinctly."

"Not everyone has a tail," Roland said, with a feeble defiance ticking in his breast.

"That's so," said the director, chewing a fingernail. "Nor does everyone want one."

And with that the interview was concluded.

Luckily Roland, in his other back pocket, had Dr. Abercrombie's inspiring letter. Now he drew it out, unfolded it and read once more: "Be proud you are different! Make the most of your unique endowment!" Roland read these two sentences over and over, folded the clipping neatly, put it once more in his pocket, and lifted his head high.

As a consequence of lifting his head high, his eyes fell upon the lettering on a third story window just off of Times Square.

MASTER YOUR MUSCLES. PERFORM AMAZING FEATS.
ASTOUND YOUR FRIENDS. TAJ MAHAL SCHOOL OF YOGI.

In no time Roland was up the flights of stairs and knocking on a soiled white door upon which the same legend was written in peeling gilt. Underneath was tacked a card: SWAMI RABINDRANATH VATRAKOSHINDAR, PROP. After an interval, an enormously fat fellow in diapers and a turban opened the door.

"Oh sure," the fellow said. "Come right in."

Here at last was more of a warm greeting. Roland beamed and stepped into the tiny room which, he noticed, was without furniture but literally plastered with scatter rugs.

"Are you Swami Rabindranath Vatrakoshindar?" he asked shyly.

"Oh sure," said Swami.

"Then," said Roland, "you are just the man I want to see. I have a tail."

"Oh sure," said the Swami.

"You know about it then!" Roland was positively enthralled. "You know what to do with tails. What can I do with mine?"

"You can switch it, that's what. Switch it."

"But that's just the trouble," Roland cried. "*I can't* switch it. I can't do a thing with it. It just hangs."

Swami suddenly squashed down upon the nearest rug and yawned.

"Oh for heaven's sake," he said, "lie down any old place and I'll see what I can do."

He scrambled around under his rug and presently brought up a small pamphlet. This he opened and read aloud: "Remove clothing down to loin cloth."

"Shorts," said Roland virtuously. "They will have to do."

"Remove clothing down to shorts," Swami amended.

Roland did so.

"Sit," read Swami in a bored voice.

Roland sat.

"I think I know what to do now," Roland said. "I contemplate my navel."

There was a long long silence from Swami Rabindranath Vatrakoshindar. Finally he said in an injured tone: "Well, if you've *read* this book . . ."

"Oh, I haven't," Roland said hastily.

"All right, then," Swami went on. "Contemplate your . . . contemplate your . . ." He paused, then continued triumphantly: "Contemplate the end of your tail."

Roland's tail was lying in a straight line directly behind him. He wondered if the Swami meant to bring it around and look at it, then decided that the meaning of the phrase was to think of it inwardly, become conscious that he had a tail with an end to it. He thought about this very hard.

"By the way," the Swami said. "For navels it's 50 cents, tails it's \$1."

But Roland was concentrating so very hard he didn't hear the Master's voice. "I will astound my friends!" he was thinking. "When I get home." After an hour's intense application, Roland began to get a bit stiff. He looked over at his tutor.

Swami lay with one foot on his bent knee, eating a salami sandwich and reading a magazine.

"What do I do now?" said Roland.

Swami lay his magazine on the summit of his vast middle, picked up the pamphlet and read: "The mind is the seat of muscular control. Are you now aware that you have a blank?" he took another bite of his sandwich and gestured slowly in the air. "It's blank here but I'll put in *tail*. Are you now aware that you have a tail?"

"Yes!" said Roland solemnly.

"Then switch it!"

Roland switched it. The act astounded him so that he was unable to do anything but gape.

"All right now," said the Swami, "Up, down; right, left; up down; right left; one two, one two . . ."

Flushed and bright-eyed, Roland performed his exercises, watching all the while, over his shoulder, his tail behave in a wonderful tail-like manner.

"Goodness," the Swami said, "you'll get a crick in your neck."

"What do I do now?" asked the breathless and happy young man.

"Belinda closed her eyes, her breast heaving, and as the monster slithered toward her over the slimy floor, choking shrieks of delight rose in her . . . oh." He stopped, put the magazine down, picked up the pamphlet. "End of Lesson I," he read. "One dollar, cash, before leaving."

"Well," said Roland, "I certainly thank you. You certainly have taught me a lot. When shall I come back?"

Together they made up a series of appointments, Roland jotting the dates down on the side of the clipping, the Swami writing them laboriously on the back of the pamphlet.

Needless to say, Roland was delirious with happiness. He wagged his tail all the way home and refused to let the fact that he almost caught it in a subway door dampen his spirits. He had to tell somebody about his progress, so he sat down and wrote to Dr. Aesop Abercrombie:

Dear Dr. Abercrombie:

You sure were right! Thanks a lot for your advice. I met the most wonderful fellow named Swami Rabindranath Vatrakoshindar and he is giving me exercises. Soon I will master my muscles and be able to perform astounding feats and amaze my friends.

Sincerely yours,
Formerly Perplexed

My dear Formerly [answered the good doctor]:

Keep up the good work! Perseverance! Excelsior! Nothing can stop you now. I am overjoyed that my small encouragement has provided you with the courage you need.

Dr. Abercrombie

When the next lesson period rolled around Roland was very early and paced the street in front of the Swami's building, aquiver with eagerness. Finally it was time. He knocked on the soiled white door and when the Swami opened it he cried: "Here I am!"

"Oh sure," said the Swami.

Once again the Swami put him through his paces which Roland performed pridefully. "What do I do now?" he asked.

Swami Rabindranath Vatrakoshindar turned a page in the pamphlet. "Hang from light cord by tail," he read.

"Right!"

Roland sprang to his feet, grasped the naked light bulb suspended from the ceiling, hoisted himself up, caused his tail to hook around the cord, and let go.

"Oops," said the Swami.

For Roland fell directly to the floor, landing on his head with a nasty crack. When he came to he noticed that the Swami was several pages along in his magazine and was sipping a chocolate malted.

"It didn't work," Roland said, a fear nagging at his heart.

"Oh there you are," said the Swami.

"It didn't work," Roland repeated. "Tell me the truth. My tail goes only up and down and sidewise, doesn't it? Not around things. I can never never never be a trapeze artist."

"End of Lesson II," read the Swami. "One dollar, cash, before leaving."

"I'm no good," said Roland. "I flunked." He stared before him at nothing.

In the street once more, Roland drooped in every part. All his high spirits of the morning had fled; he felt himself a failure. Almost without realizing it, he put his tail in his hind pocket. His self confidence was gone. Only one thing remained, one small chance: he put an ad in the paper as follows:

Boy with tail wants job. Will do anything. Write Box 2563M.

He got an answer.

The good Dr. Abercrombie, always interested in those who wrote to him for advice, watched each day's mail closely for a third letter from *Perplexed*. Over his afternoon tea and pie, he wondered about the fate of the uniquely endowed young man.

"Have fame and fortune reached him?" he mused to his secretary. "Are his friends agape with astonishment and awe?"

In the end, Dr. Abercrombie's curiosity got the better of him and he, with some difficulty, sought out the learned Swami Rabindranath Vatrakoshindar and inquired after his patient.

Swami Rabindranath Vatrakoshindar, who was now proprietor of a billiard parlor, failed to remember Roland at first but at last the doctor's skillful psychological questioning brought out that such a young man with a tail had, at one time, taken a series of lessons from him at \$1 a throw.

"And then what happened?" Dr. Abercrombie asked gently.

"He left," said the Swami.

"He left," the doctor repeated. His keen mind reconstructed the scene and he saw that Roland could have done then only one thing . . .

Detective work came easily to this man to whom thousands confessed their aches and pains. He located at last the ad in the *Forthright* files and continued on from there.

So it was that a distinguished-looking gentleman with white hair and kind brown eyes approached a certain counter in the basement of Saks Avenue A.

"Is there," he asked the clerk, a crone of uncertain years who was covered with warts, "a man with a tail working here?"

Several warts knocked together on her forehead when she frowned.

"At night," she said, "there's Roland Feeny."

"I'll wait," said the doctor.

The store closed. The woman clutched her lizard handbag and went home. When dusk fell a stooped and pale-faced fellow descended the narrow stairs. The doctor watched him as he pulled from his back pocket a gloriously tawny red-gold duster and commenced with it to flick the bric-a-brac and chinaware. He did not notice the distinguished looking man standing in the gloom and was startled in the extreme when the doctor stepped forth from the shadows and announced himself.

"Are you happy?" the doctor asked earnestly.

"Yes," said Roland. "Happy Harry's Horror House was not for me. In the museum I should have become bored, and, as for being a famous trapeze artist in the circus . . . it was not my fate, since I am allergic to peanuts. Here I have found a place for my small talents in the workaday world. One day I shall climb my way up to Gimbel's basement. I am content."

With a light heart and a light step Dr. Abercrombie left Saks Avenue A and continued on uptown for supper, glowing with the knowledge that once more he had helped his fellowman along life's thorny path.



The time-traveler from the future has been portrayed as a superciliously amused tourist, as a benevolent and all-powerful deus ex machina temporis, as a cautiously non-intervening scientific observer . . . and in all these guises as one who has things well in hand, to the benefit or confusion of the less fortunate men of the present. Now Kris Neville (who demonstrated so ably, in Underground Movement, that a telepathic mutant may not be a superman) shows a visitor from the future as a hag-ridden man, terribly caught in the trap of his own chronokinetic problem, relentlessly driven by the mission which he must accomplish, psychically and even physically tormented by the very fact of his movement in time. This is something different in time travel stories, compelling unusual empathy with its protagonist and posing a tantalizing unresolved question.

Mission

by KRIS NEVILLE

THE 1928 model Ford materialized just off the highway that led to Washington, D. C. It was night. The moon was low. The bright band of stars in the Milky Way swept across the sky; the other stars seemed to be sparks struck off from it as if from flint. The wind gentled to a murmur.

The driver of the Ford was an old man with dingy, carelessly cared-for white hair. His face was lined, his features sunken. His lips were thin — correct lips, one might think, devoid of emotion. Calculating lips. The face was of a man accustomed to having his own way; to that extent it was childish. Irascible, petulant, impatient. It was the face of a man who dramatized himself to himself; of an egotist.

He did not know for how long he could survive. Data on the subject was theoretical; a pragmatic demonstration was as impossible as one of the Hereafter. No one had ever come back to talk about it. He almost strangled on his first breath of air.

It was all he could do to keep from clawing at his collar in desperation. He made himself relax. He was master of his body; it must submit to his will. He would not permit himself to become frightened.

He took a short breath and held it. Some of the fire went out of his lungs.

He took a deeper breath. He was oxygen-starved. It was as if he were on a high plateau. His lungs struggled with air that was indefinitely different from the air they had breathed only lungfuls ago. He began to breathe more quickly. The breath rasped and rattled in his throat.

After nearly ten minutes he decided that he was breathing easily enough to attempt to drive.

He started the motor of the car and wheeled it out onto the highway. He pulled to the outside lane. He drove slowly for fear of being stopped for a traffic violation. Until he could discover the date, he would not know which identification cards to use. A box on the seat beside him contained six different sets designed to cover any date between 1930 and 1950. The car was a model that would not appear improbable as early as 1927. Although the body quivered and rattled and shook uncomfortably, the motor ran smoothly.

He hoped it was before 1940. If it were later, the probability of accomplishing his mission would be considerably lessened. The date itself would depend on the limit of his compatibility, beyond which limit — that is to say, before which time — he could not be materialized.

A car flicking past him in the night revealed that he was at least in the Forties. He was not one of those people who can tell the year of manufacture at a glance; but he knew that the car had been too sleek and too low slung to have been made earlier.

He realized that he had forgotten his lights. He hastily pulled them on. The oversight made him faintly ill.

Ahead of him the sky was colored by the dim night glow of the city not yet asleep. He could picture the Capitol, the Supreme Court Building, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, and the White House in their correct relationship to each other upon the mathematically precise grid of the streets. The year wouldn't make too much difference in that respect. He would be able to find his way around.

Wilson's house in Georgetown, he thought: a man like that Secretary of State! One tries to explain simple things to him: he flies apart: no self control: one keeps insisting . . .

His breathing had become less difficult. He was not going to smoke, however. His lungs were sufficiently burdened.

Before he had gone another mile, he took out a cigarette. He took two quick, nervous puffs before he remembered his previous resolution. He threw the cigarette out the window. (It's nothing, he thought: the strain; no harm in two puffs.)

He had not noticed before that his face was feverish. The excitement. How did he feel? There was a sense of urgency and the fear that he might

fail. Not that he could fail. Still, the fear was there, in the background. Annoying. Perhaps an old man can't meet up to the challenge after all.

Nonsense. I can't fail, he thought. (Destiny quickens the old, sluggish blood to inevitable success.) A man who gives his life doesn't fail. There is a peculiar justice to reward martyrdom with success. If the cause is right.

He passed an all-night restaurant. Through the window he could see a magazine rack. He pulled over to the side of the road. He wanted a cup of coffee or a drink of something stronger. Bad for the heart.

An old man, he thought, can permit himself a cigarette. He lit one. He puffed once and threw it away. Damned weakness, he thought; shouldn't tolerate it. Bend the body, bend the will. Concentrate.

After the reaction passed, he got out and walked back to the restaurant. He bought a *Washington Post*. He folded the paper and tucked it under his arm.

It was only when he was safely back in the car that he spread the paper out and scanned it quickly with the flashlight beam.

He was closer to his own present than he had counted on.

It was already later than period six.

(I'm being tried, he thought; obstacles are put in my way. The testing. A piling up of complications. Blind fate is arrayed against me. But I shall not feel sorry for myself.)

He took out the last set of identification papers. They were prepared for the period between 1947 and 1950. They would have to do. He read the card bearing the name and address of a hotel; it was probably still in operation. He slipped the other cards into his billfold.

He started the motor and drove slowly to Washington. The streets were changed, but they were not unfamiliar. He found the hotel easily. He parked on the quiet street.

In the hotel lobby he set his watch by the clock above the desk. It was almost midnight.

It took the sleepy night clerk too long to fill out the card. The man irritated him.

When the clerk asked for payment in advance, he snapped, "I've got bags!"

"Yes, sir."

He superintended the bellboy's handling of the four pieces of luggage. "Be careful," he cautioned. "Watch that . . . Don't be so clumsy."

The bellboy tested his window and peered into his closet and opened the door to his shower and turned on the light.

"Don't fuss around so."

The bellboy waited, hands at his sides.

"No tip. I don't believe in tipping."

The bellboy was gone. He locked the door.

He went to the shower and drew a glass of water. He carried it back to the bed. He sat down. He drank it.

He lay back on the bed. He writhed in agony. (God, God, he thought; why must I be made to suffer so? Why must everything be arrayed against me?)

After five minutes, weak and drenched with perspiration, he was able to relax. His heart hammered, and his lungs worked in huge gasps.

Trembling, he sat up.

Careful, watch the heart. It's old. It could stop.

I can't die, he thought suddenly: tortured, wracked with pain — but death, no: not until I am done. Not until I say for it to come.

He shuddered. Don't think about it, he told himself.

He stood up and crossed to the largest of his trunks. He bent down. He was not used to bending down. His body was rusty. He fumbled with the straps. He got the trunk open.

There were six compartments, only one of which was any good to him. He unloaded that one onto the dresser top. He closed the trunk and pushed it under the bed. He would not need it again. (How odd, he thought, those detailed accounts of well-known historical data will appear when they come to light after my death . . . and the cryptic notes.)

He picked up the instruction sheets from the dresser and carried them to the bed. (Old men like to sit down, he thought; have to conserve my energy.) But before he could begin to read, his body was shaken by a chill. Come on, damn you, he thought; do your damndest!

When the chill passed, he lit a cigarette, noting that at this rate his two cartons would be gone shortly. Shouldn't have brought any, he thought. Creature comforts; the little things, you get to notice them more as you grow older.

He glanced at his instructions. There was a summary of the events between 1947 and 1950. He could depend on his own memory of the period for what general information he might need. He turned the page.

There were outlines of five courses of action. Only two would still be valid. The one, he knew, had an estimated success factor of 80 per cent; the alternate, of 50 per cent. The possibility of accomplishing either was considerably less than that of any course before 1940. He studied the alternate.

The psychologist, he thought, could he really know that much about the tangled strand of human motivations? But he must be right.

(I've changed a lot through the years, he thought. I see things so much more clearly. I could scarcely recognize myself that once used to exist in the

confusions and uncertainties, and how could I reason with that self?)

He shuddered. The psychologists know so much . . . and more. Don't trust them, myself. A lot of things they don't understand, but . . .

He discarded the alternate.

The accepted outline consisted of scarcely more than key words. Enough merely to refresh his memory. There was a trunk reference number at the end.

My contact is Levos, he thought. That's better than some.

"Ray Levos," he read. "Press Club; Shoreham Hotel; Allies Club (after hours: bottle). Home address unknown."

He glanced at his watch. If I'm lucky, he thought, Ray will be at the Allies tonight.

He went to the dresser. Have to convince him, he thought. Mustn't forget to pick up a bottle for appearances, too.

He found a membership card for the Allies Club among the material from the trunk. (I wonder where they managed to locate that? he thought.) He pocketed the tin box that contained an ink pad. He filled his billfold from the sheaf of currency. (The silver in his pocket was all minted in the twenties.)

He slipped his coat off and removed the vest. Not many people still wearing them this late, he thought. He put the coat back on and adjusted the tie.

He phoned the desk for a cab. He could wait until tomorrow to put his no-longer-necessary car in storage.

Seated in the Allies Club with a drink before him, he surveyed the room carefully.

You could depend on Winchell being at the Stork, he thought, but Ray isn't a Winchell. Perhaps he won't come in. I'll have to phone his paper tomorrow.

The drink went flat.

I haven't much time, he thought.

It was after 2 o'clock when Ray arrived. The man from the future recognized the reporter immediately. But his memory had aged others as his own body had aged; supplying for Ray from imagination the thinning hair, the broadening waist, the sagging face muscles. It was as if this younger Ray had been quaffing youth at the magic fountain. The man from the future hated him.

He stood up and threaded his way through the crowd to Ray's table.

"Ray? Ray Levos?"

"Yeah?"

"I think," the man from the future said in a voice he normally used in addressing undergraduate students who came to his luncheons, "I think we have mutual friends."

I must be careful, he thought. Don't give him a chance to argue, not until I'm in a better position to convince him who I am. That's the first step: you have to convince somebody.

Ray studied him.

His suit was ill-fitting and outdated; his shirt collar was loose and wrinkled above the crudely knotted tie. His fingernails were unkept; there was a day-old gray stubble on his jowls. The eyes in the old, sunken face glittered intently.

"Yeah?" Ray said. "Sit down."

He sees a story, the old man thought. A human interest paragraph for his column: *Last night I was approached at my table in the Allies Club by a scholarly-looking gentleman who . . .* That's good.

The old man smiled thinly and eased himself into a chair.

"Mutual friends?" Ray said. Professional interest was not enough to conceal the vague annoyance in his voice.

"I know Gene Martin quite well." Don't sound so nervous, he thought.

"Oh, yeah? Last I heard, Gene was teaching at Oregon State, wasn't it? How is he now?"

"He'll be made a full professor next year."

"You don't say . . . Say," Ray said, looking more closely at the man. "You're not his father?"

"No, I'm not his father."

"You look a little like Gene. Care for a cigarette?"

"Thanks," the man from the future said.

They lit cigarettes.

"Gene's a smart boy," the reporter said.

"One of the most brilliant men in the country." The man from the future began to cough.

Ray half rose from his chair. "Something wrong?"

"It's . . . close in here. Have trouble breathing. Be all right in a moment . . ." (Like Job, he thought, I have been afflicted: the degree of my success is in proportion to my suffering. Oh, that damned pain. Hard to get over the reaction: personalize it: puts one in conflict with . . . Fate? Lends one dignity.)

"I'll get you a drink."

"No. No, don't bother. I'm better already."

"That's a bad cough."

". . . asthma, I think. Whoooo. That's better."

A vital moment, although you couldn't tell it by the room, he thought. The tables, the stupidly average people, the heavy pall of blue smoke. Spine-tingling. Once in my life I'm the most important thing that ever lived. It's awesome.

He removed the ink-pad tin and opened it. He enjoyed the slowness of his movement. Cliff-hanging, they called it in the early movies, he thought.

This is no more vital than the preceding moment or any subsequent one until I succeed, he thought. But in the dim smoke-filled room it seems so. My nose prickles. Will I convince him?

He pressed the fingers of his right hand to the pad and then transferred the ink impression of them to the back of his membership card.

I decided this was the proper way, he thought. This has the necessary color of intrigue and mystery.

He looked at the results for a moment and then wiped his fingers on his handkerchief. He handed the card across the table.

"What's this?"

"You're a reporter, Ray —"

I'll be damned if I'll call him Mr. Levos.

"You know some police detectives — someone who could rep the — excuse me, *check* the —"

Watch the anachronistic slang, he told himself. Stick to dictionary English, at least for tonight. Don't make him too suspicious.

"— the identity of this set of prints with the F.B.I.?" he concluded.

"That's an odd thing to ask, Mr. . . . ?"

"The name's on the card."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Roberts. All right, Mr. Roberts. Now what's the idea of this funny stuff?"

He bent forward. "I'm trying to convince you who I am."

"You could try telling me."

"I want you to phone me at the Wilton Hotel when you check those prints." He stood up. "Gene was your roommate. I know him very well. He'll appreciate anything you can do for me."

How did that sound? How much of it was sheer indulgence of a hidden desire for melodrama? Did I try hard enough? And: *Am I worthy to try?* (Mustn't think of that; they gave me the awesome responsibility: of course I am.) But subconsciously do I hope that Ray won't check the prints? (How did that thought creep in? Of course I'm worthy.)

"By God, wait a minute here —"

But the man from the future was halfway to the door. That's over, he thought. He'll call me. I hope I worked it right.

Ray settled back in the seat and stared at the card.

Two days later in his hotel room he lay on the bed smoking a cigarette. He had smoked four packs since he had talked to Ray. He was recovering from a cold. He had sent out for food only once, but he was not hungry.

It took the shot too long to break the cold, he thought. Perhaps I didn't give it to myself properly; perhaps, in the years of freedom from colds, I've lost all resistance. Don't let there be another forgotten disease!

He crushed out the cigarette.

I'll give him another day to phone. If he doesn't (within two packages of cigarettes: I'll ration them, one an hour, no more) I'll try to find someone else. A Congressman. A Congressman will do.

But Ray will phone.

Sitting up weakly, he thought: The cold's gone, but the seizures keep recurring with undiminished intensity; indeed, with greater severity.

He lay back. If one gets the math, he thought, one sees that the temporal perceptor is a sensitive jelly and each compression wave in it upsets my compatibility coefficient. The waves roll forward and bounce back against me and my body translates them as chills and fevers.

He wanted to shake his fists at the wall. It would take too much energy. He lay quiet.

I ought to have a cigarette.

I've got to eat. . . .

He phoned room service and ordered.

I've already brought about minor changes in the perceptor, he thought. That's what sets off the compression waves. I've created a perceptor time outside of time: a time in which our perceptor time is static. At what point do my actions change the future? It must be at the point of direct interference. Thank God for that! I'd be dead already if it were sequential. It's logical, though, because otherwise the point of direct interference would never be reached . . .

If, he thought, we'd had more time to experiment. If the cat could have talked. . . . Two damned cats four weeks before the machine was finished. Very unusual to walk into the laboratory and find that Rattler had twinned herself. Well, damned cats, anyway. Hate them.

If the older Rattler could have talked we might have known that a compression wave killed her. The speed-up must have made the compression wave. Painful death: screeching and yowling and scratching . . . Still, with proof of success, we finished ahead of schedule.

My compatibility is a guarantee of some sort of temporal tolerance. (A trivial accident in the society of cave men might magnify into a world that never heard of Hitler.) I can't let myself be destroyed by some unwitting act. I might take a cab that otherwise would have permitted a girl to catch

a train, meet a husband, have a baby who would have become . . . It's hard, he thought, to know.

I remember thinking as I put Rattler into the machine: You're going to kill her. But I couldn't stop. I wasn't able to.

The past makes the future, casts it in a hard mold. That's sure. You can't escape the past.

But then, if it hadn't been for the second Rattler, we wouldn't have known what the past demanded, and not knowing, we wouldn't have realized that we were doing merely what had to be done — oh, hell! This is —

'It's finished,' I said. 'Let's test it.' I put the dial on minimum power. 'What with?' 'The cat.' '. . . all right,' I said. My God! Stop thinking about it!

The steak will be good. Nutritious. I wish room service would hurry.

. . . After that, we were shaken. We put it on maximum power and sent back an ash tray. Maximum power shorted out half a dozen circuits. How far back, I still don't know. Figuring from our experience with Rattler, 1929. But the limit of compatibility may have been later. Danny (I never did trust him) and I did the math while the technicians made repairs.

'The cat,' Danny said. *No*, I wanted to say. But we used the cat.

Stop it! Stop thinking!

His body was drenched with perspiration when he heard the knock and the voice: "Room service."

"Oh, come in, come in," he said desperately. . . .

It was hours later that Ray phoned. "I'm downstairs. May I come up?"

"Do. Please do," he said. He was surprised at the sobbing relief in his voice. Shameful. If he hadn't come, I would have figured out another contact, he thought.

And then he thought! I hope it isn't important to the future that he be anywhere else.

These minor changes of the future, he thought, are being visited upon me: I am doomed to suffer.

I will stand against them; I shall not bow. They ennoble me.

(I don't enjoy them, he thought: the vicious satisfaction isn't joy.)

Ray was knocking at the door.

"Come in."

Ray entered.

"Sit down." I knew he'd come, the old man thought.

Ray sat down. "That was a damned clever trick, mister. How did you manage it?"

"I am Gene Martin."

Ray shook his head. "I can't buy that. Gene's a year younger than I am."
"Look at me."

"I'm willing to believe you're some relation of his."

"No, I'm he. I'm what he will be in the future."

"Nuts," Ray said. "What's the pitch?"

I've got to convince you! Gene thought. If I can't: big, black abyss, down, down, little boy, terrified, running, huge, hungry birds in the sky, figures in white, terrifying; everything; there's no ground under my feet! the graveyard — what's in the graveyard? *I've got to convince you!* "Ask me some questions about Gene."

"I checked: Gene's still at Oregon State."

"Ask me some questions," the old man pleaded.

". . . all right, what was the color of Mary's dress at the senior prom?"

"No," Gene said frantically. He cracked his knuckles nervously. "I don't see how you can expect me to remember that, Ray." How much have I forgotten? he sobbed to himself.

"It was blue," Ray said. "What was the picture above Gene's bed? Is that a fair question?"

"The Indian picture," Gene said eagerly. "*The Last Warrior*, something like that. You used to call it, *Returning from a Conference with the Great White Father in Washington*."

With deliberate slowness Ray lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. "You remember what I did the day Ed swiped a copy of the history exam from Doc Ewing?"

"Yes," Gene said quickly. "This should convince you: You gave the class a list of wrong answers and cut the test."

Ray twisted uncomfortably. "You ought to open a window. It's stuffy in here." He put the cigarette on the ash tray. "I think there's a question only Gene and I know the answer to."

"You mean, Who was Nelly Striebor Dawes? We were both sophomores that year, Ray."

"I'll be Goddamned," Ray said. He stood up and walked to the window. He opened it and looked out over the city. Across town, the lights were on around the Washington Monument. The sun had left twilight in the sky. "I'll be Goddamned."

He turned from the city. "It's a good act. It's so good I can half believe you are Gene."

Of course, Gene thought. I knew I could convince him. I wasn't worried. "They were Gene's fingerprints," he reminded the reporter.

"What's this nonsense about the future?"

"Look at me. I'm an old man. The Gene at Oregon State is younger than

you are. Phone Oregon State. I'll pay. Phone the physics department. They'll tell you Gene taught his classes today. Maybe you can get to talk to him. How can I be here and there both?"

"That's impossible. That would be time travel. That's impossible."

Gene gestured at the phone.

". . . I know he's there," Ray said.

"You travel in time, Ray. Every second. It's a two-way street."

"That's silly," Ray said. "You can't tell me that. Man can't slow it up or speed it up or turn it back. All man can do is measure it."

He's still a conceited fool, Gene thought. "I can't explain the math to you, Ray. If you'd passed calculus you wouldn't be a reporter today."

"It's against all reason, man. Time is merely a measure of the rate of change."

"I'll see if I can put it in words," Gene said. "Don't think of time as a unity. Think of it as being divisible. There is a human temporal continuum — a perceptor time — that governs human history; and it is not the same time that determines the — say — decay of radioactivity: it is conditional upon a variable number of human events. Whether a man takes an hour or a day to travel 100 miles has no influence on the interstellar space-time continuum, but it vastly influences the historical perceptor. Exactly as I influence and am influenced by the temporal aspect of the historical perceptor without influencing the radiological time continuum. The temporal factor of any continuum is relative to the standard of measure."

Ray looked around the room. "I need a drink," he said. "All right. I'll call you Gene. I'll listen to what you have to say."

"I better phone down for a bottle. Bourbon?"

"Bourbon will be fine," Ray said.

While they were waiting for the whisky, Gene thought: I'll have to try to anticipate his arguments. I'll have to try to guess his thoughts and counter his objections in advance.

After each had a whisky-and-water in his hand, Gene said, "You've got to help me see the President."

"The President?" Ray said, startled. "I couldn't get you an appointment with him even if I wanted to."

He's lying, Gene thought. I won't be put off. He could if he'd try. "Damn it, you've got to!"

Ray put his glass on the floor. "I said I'd listen. That doesn't mean you can order me around. I don't go for that, mister."

Gene blinked his eyes rapidly.

"Now, now, don't get upset," he said.

You've gone at it wrong, he thought. There's some people you can't bully.

"I'm sorry, Ray. I didn't mean it that way. I'm a tired old man. Tired, Ray. Don't tell me it's impossible to see the President, Ray, please don't."

"I'm not telling you anything that isn't true. Even if I wanted to I couldn't do you any good. He's getting ready to start on a two-week cruise."

He doesn't like me, Gene thought. He never did.

"People don't like me," he said pathetically. "I know I'm not easy to get along with. I admit it. I'm sorry I made you mad. I didn't intend to. I'm an old man. I thought you'd help me; I need the help so desperately." He held up his hands. I have to crucify myself, he thought. "Look at them: they're not strong any more. I've been given a young man's job — that's what's wrong with the world: they always send the old men out when there's anything important to be done. Statesmen, generals. They keep the young for the dying. I'm different only in that respect, Ray: they sent an old man to die. I've got to depend on young hands. I'm helpless, I'm a helpless old man."

"Maybe you better tell me what you want to see him for."

That's better, Gene thought. I'm just a poor old man, and he feels sorry for me. It's true: I'm old and helpless. And he's going to help me. *He has to.*

"I've got to change the future," he said.

Ray slumped deeper in the chair and peered out behind half-closed eyes. "I told you I'd listen."

The old man's eyes were feverish. He bent forward. He spread his hands a foot apart as if they held the physical substance of his argument; as if he could present the argument to Ray as he might present a package. The three-day growth of beard on his face made him appear even more fanatical.

"Mankind is about to be destroyed," he said.

He cleared his throat. *He's got to believe!*

"All mankind — all over the world."

He was becoming excited. "Right now, today, there is a terrible focal area of this destruction. It has to be eliminated; rooted out; destroyed! We have to be able to fight the war to a conclusion without killing off all life!"

Ray's voice was strained. "You — do I understand you correctly? — you want to see the President and have him atom bomb some city in Russia?" He retrieved his drink.

Gene licked his lips. His hands were shaking with excitement. "Russia? Not Russia, Ray."

"Then . . . ?"

"Australia. Southern Australia."

"Just a minute . . ." Ray protested.

"Please," Gene said. He leaned back and gasped for air.

He straightened up and shook his head. He got to his feet and began to pace the room. "You're thinking about it wrong, Ray: chauvinistically. You're thinking that right now Australia is on your side. How do you know who will be the enemy — how do you know who will be on whose side a few years from now? How do you know what realignment of powers will take place? Think back over the last few years . . . But I'm not interested in whose side she's on; I'm interested in saving at least something of the race."

"Your story doesn't hang together," Ray said. "If an atomic blast got out of hand and destroyed the world, you wouldn't have time to get away in a time machine — let alone have time to prepare for the trip."

"You're thinking in *your* terms, Ray. You've got to think in ours. It wasn't anything atomic. It was a growth hormone that inhibits all plant life, that neutralizes chlorophyll. It's carried by a rapid-breeding, air-borne bacterium. They got everywhere. If you could see our young wheat fields, forests, lawns, gardens . . . *Should you be somewhere right now?*"

"Eh?" Ray said. "What's that got to do with . . . I canceled an appointment — nothing important."

Gene winced in pain as the compression wave rolled over him. He sagged to the bed, clutching at his side. "Let me alone for a minute, please. I'm afraid your appointment — oh, damn this . . ."

Ray stood up, suddenly awkward. "What is this — your tired-old-man act again? Are you really sick?"

Gene was breathing with difficulty. "Oh . . . no, no, no . . ."

"How in hell can I get into your mind? Can I get you something?"

Gene shook his head. "There's still . . . some pain in my side. But I'm all right, I think." His face was damp and ashen. "Could you get me a drink? Water seems to help."

"I'll get it," Ray said. He hurried to the washbasin.

Gene was trembling. He's afraid I'll die, Gene thought. Then he'd never be able to know what to believe about me. But I won't die. Not yet.

Ray drew a glass of water and carried it to the bed.

"Thanks," Gene said. He drank. Some of the water dribbled over his chin. He was panting.

"We had better than a month to prepare," he said after a moment. "We had just finished the machine — on military contract. We —"

Ray had returned to the chair. "Why did the government pick you?"

". . . government didn't. There was considerable confusion. The — Well, the . . . Our experimental group acted on its own. We didn't have

much time, only the month. I was chosen by — by consent. They thought I had the best contact possibilities for the job."

"What, then, exactly, is the job?"

"That's more like it, Ray. That's better. All I ask is that you be reasonable and listen. . . . I don't think we'll have to bomb Australia. There might not even need to be any bloodshed. Not much. Maybe the President would have to move troops in. Certainly he'd have to demolish . . . You see, I don't know for sure how far along things are by now. He'd be able to know after I told him what to look for. He could tell how much had to be done. Things may be too far advanced for a painless solution."

Ray relaxed into the chair. "Suppose you've convinced me. I'll admit your story sounds good. Particularly if you are Gene Martin. It holds together. But what makes you think you can convince the President? I'm a special case. I know Gene. I doubt if you could convince anyone who didn't know him that you are him, let alone . . ."

"If I could just get to see the President! I convinced you. I came prepared to convince him. You've got to help me, Ray. I appeal to you for hands."

There, Gene thought, it's easy. I've presented it well.

"My God, think what you'd be asking the President to take on faith."

". . . I have documents, photographs . . ."

"They could be faked."

"I could talk to the scientists; my knowledge can't be faked, Ray."

Ray shook his head.

"I convinced you," the old man said. He relaxed. There. There. There, he thought. You'll help me see the President. That's all I want from you.

"I'll move heaven and earth to get the appointment," Ray said.

Gene felt exhilarating confidence surge through his body. Ahhh, ahhhh, there, he thought. "Tomorrow?"

"It will take at least a month."

"No!"

"I'm sorry, Gene. These things take time; I've been around for quite a while; I know. It's impossible to do anything until he gets back from his vacation."

No! Gene shrieked to himself. "Next month? I . . . I can't live near that long! My heart . . . the attacks . . . I've got less than a week. I can tell." His face twisted in anguish and he fretted at the pillow case.

"Why did they send a man in your physical condition, then?"

"I'm not the first diplomat with a weak heart. They didn't know about it . . . There was a great deal of — of confusion . . . There are complications here — strains, excitements. I'm living on will power, Ray, right now, pure will power."

"Does it have to be the President, then? Isn't there anyone else you could see? Isn't there some other way you can go about it?"

". . . no. No . . . Well — yes: there is. There's another course of action." Gene suddenly felt old and tired. His body ached. "It might work as well; it might. Who can tell? What seemingly insignificant act might even work as well? We can't tell. We selected the most direct feasible action for one man to accomplish in a limited time, but there are so many imponderables — so many." He felt energy flowing out of him. "If, for instance, Hegel had never written his books, what would have been the affect on Marx? On the October Revolution?" Stop it! he thought. Your mind is beginning to wander! I'm not defeated! I'm not defeated!

He lit a cigarette. ". . . I'll . . . I'll have to take the other course, now. That's all there's time for."

"Tell me something," Ray said. "Suppose you do succeed. What will the new future be like?"

Gene felt his nerves begin to quiver. "I don't know."

"How do you know mankind won't figure out another way to commit suicide?"

"I don't know that, either . . ."

"All right, Gene," Ray said. "I've listened to your story. I'm a reporter, I'm trained to listen. I've even agreed to help you see the President."

"I'll be dead before you could get the appointment."

"You can't be sure. Meanwhile, I'll help you get in to see whoever else you want to . . ."

"I am sure," Gene said wearily.

"We'll see," the reporter said. He poured himself another drink and added tap water. Standing before the bed, the drink in his right hand, he looked down at the huddled figure of the man from the future. "Now let me talk for a little while. Let's assume you are Gene; let's say I'm convinced . . . I remember Gene very well. He wasn't a likable person. I've seen him fly into insane rages. But we'll let my personal reactions pass. Gene was insecure and frustrated and frightened by society. He had let himself become self-centered; everything was for *him*; he always seemed to imagine himself in the big role. He was brilliant, yes; but he was also vicious and vindictive . . . He lived in the laboratory instead of the world. He liked things he could weigh up; he liked things to come out even. He liked problems to have answers. He needed to see things as blacks and whites. No in-betweens. He never understood that human society isn't like a laboratory. Do you see what I'm trying to get at? No, let me finish first. He could become a warped and dangerous man . . . How can anyone know how much time has changed him? Have his frustrations been eliminated or have

they been aggravated? Is he a better man or a worse? How can anyone know what his motives are?"

"I have documents, photographs . . ." Gene said, twisting his hands excitedly.

"They could be faked."

Gene's lips drew into a taut line. He struggled to control his rage. "I'm giving my life!" he cried. He sprang up, moving his hands rapidly. "My old life. It's not much. I'm giving all I have, all in the world an old man has . . ."

"History is full of fanatics," Ray said quietly.

"Goddamn you, oh, Goddamn you!" Gene said, shaking his fist at Ray. "I've stood enough from you! I'm twice your age! You're a fool! I won't tolerate your impudence! You've badgered me with questions designed to prove I'm a liar! You've —"

He fell back on the bed, twitching, gasping, clutching his chest above his heart. His face grew purple.

"Water," he pleaded. "Worst yet, oh, God, oh, God! *I can't die!* I won't. I won't . . . I won't!"

Ray's hands were shaking as he filled the glass. The shrill, imperative near-hysteria in the voice was frightening.

"No! No! No!" Gene cried. He tried to sit up.

Ray was at his side. "There. There. Drink this."

The old man ignored him. He lay back. His hands twitched nervously at the coverlet. "No, no, no!" he cried. His breathing became easier. He collapsed and began to cry.

Ray said slowly, "I wish I could know what to believe. Are you here to do God's work or the Devil's? Are you a savior or a demagog?"

Gene struggled to a sitting position. "I'm telling the truth. How can you vouchsafe the character of the man picked by circumstance and fate to try to save the remnant of the race? *Can you afford not to believe?*"

"I'm just a reporter."

Leadently, Gene took the glass. He drank thirstily. "It's good." He put the glass down and shook his fist at the wall. "You'll not stop me, damn you! Pound me! Persecute me! But you'll not stop me!" He turned to Ray. "Destiny," he whimpered. He fumbled out a cigarette. His last one still smoked in the ash tray. "You've got to help me, Ray. I can't survive long. You'll have to go with me."

"It's not for me to say whether you're a humanitarian in the ultimate sense or an insane partisan of some sort. I'm not qualified to judge. Who do you want to see?"

". . . Gene Martin." He felt pain in his side. He's got to go with me. I

can't survive alone. I'm a poor, helpless old man . . . Another compression wave, and my heart may . . .

"But that's you! What in the name of God do you want to see yourself for?"

Gene said, "He . . . I . . . Gene . . . We knew a man called Wilson. He worshiped Gene for . . . while he was in college. You haven't heard of him yet; you will. Wilson makes the crucial decision to release the hormone. He is presented with two alternatives. He selects the wrong one . . . The psychologist in our group (psychology is more of a science than now, remember) suggested that if he had suffered a severe emotional shock in his youth, he might have chosen differently. It involves life and death, the choice, so the shock must be right. He's young, right now; he knows Gene — there is a deep personal attachment between them; if the attachment is deep enough, Gene can provide the shock. We thought first of eliminating Wilson, but that might not serve, because we couldn't know what type of personality history would then choose to fulfil his role . . . If the shock is severe enough, the psychologist felt that there is a good chance Wilson's decision would have been correct. My side hurts. I hope I can live long enough. I've got to, that's all . . ."

"But what is the thing Gene has to do?"

"Commit suicide," the old man said. "He must shoot himself in front of Wilson. I have his suicide note in that trunk."

Ray was shaken. He remained motionless. "My God! That's . . . That would be . . . Suicide; *double* suicide! You'd be destroying . . ."

"It's all that's left. I have to convince myself to commit suicide in order to save life on this planet." He shuddered, thinking of the compression wave that would rend his present body; he remembered the second Rattler.

Ray's face was white. His hands were trembling. His eyes narrowed. *Don't you see what you've done?"*

"What? What?" Gene said. Ice formed in his stomach.

Ray began to speak slowly. His voice was strained. "I offered to get you an appointment with the President . . ."

"There isn't time!"

" . . . because," Ray continued, "the final decision wouldn't have been mine. I could help you see any man in a responsible position without committing myself. But now . . . If I let you leave this room alive the decision is *my* responsibility. *Are you the agent of some future Hitler or Franco or Stalin? I've got to know the truth!* I'm the only man in the world who can stop Gene Martin!"

My God, oh, my God, the old man thought. His lips were bloodless.

"What are you going to do?" he asked weakly.

If people just won't believe in you, this modern world offers you a lovely out. You can always make believe in the "let's pretend" world of Hollywood. It works fine, too — until you try to convince some gal who's been around that you really are what you say you are!

Anachronism

by CHAD OLIVER

JONATHAN NEWCASTLE stretched out his long, black-clad arms and clawed the thin fingers of his skeletal hands. A spine-chilling laugh from out of the pits of hell threw cold mockery at the crouching world. His red eyes reached out for the silken girl, impaling her with terror. She shrank back against the iron of the corroded street light, her white face framed by her wild dark hair.

She screamed desperately and the cold echoes chased each other through the empty street.

Power sang a mad hymn through Jonathan Newcastle's veins. He gathered himself, the tense muscles writhing in his arms. Now —

"Cut!" yelled the director.

Jonathan Newcastle smiled and lowered his arms. The fire died to smoldering coals in his eyes as he relaxed.

"That's enough play-acting for one night, old girl," he said, firing up a cigarette. "I've chased you up and down that street so many times I feel more like a track star than a vampire. What a life."

"I'm sorry you find it boring," Rita Reynolds said huskily.

"Don't get me wrong, fair damsel. There's nobody I'd rather chase up and down dark alleys, believe me. But I never catch up with you —"

Rita Reynolds arched her fantastic eyebrows and brushed back her soft hair.

"Perhaps that can be remedied soon," she suggested.

"A consummation devoutly to be desired," Jonathan Newcastle assured her. "Is that supper date still on?"

"Of course, darling. Just give me about twenty minutes to get this make-up off."

"Carry on," Jonathan Newcastle said, airily waving his hand. "But hurry — my chef is preparing something extra special."

"Back in a flash."

She left him with a tantalizing smile and swished off the set, her silk gown gleaming under the bright lights. Jonathan Newcastle nodded to the director and walked over to his dressing room, whistling cheerfully. He felt good. Tonight, at last, was the night. He was getting damned sick and tired of that miserable *canned* blood — so typical of their false, artificial, *cynical* civilization.

"Nice apartment you've got here," observed Rita Reynolds, sinking into a comfortable armchair and crossing her slim legs.

"I find it amusing," Jonathan Newcastle agreed. "It's really quite an improvement over other dwelling places I've been forced to occupy in my time."

"Ah, the hardships of the struggling artist."

"You don't know the half of it, my dear. Would you care for a drink before supper?"

"You can say that again, you nice man. Make it something demure and ladylike — Scotch and soda, say, with the accent on the Scotch."

Jonathan Newcastle rubbed his hands together gleefully and bustled out into the kitchenette. Oh wonderful, wonderful! He'd show them, all right. They'd rue the day they'd laughed at Jonathan Newcastle! He hummed a little tune as he whipped up a potent Scotch and soda. He set the glass on the sink, poured himself out a tall glassful of dark red fluid from a pitcher in the electric refrigerator and added a couple of ice cubes. Nothing like an appetizer before dinner!

"Here you are, fair maiden," he said, handing her the Scotch and soda. "Would you care to propose a toast?"

"Suppose we just drink to supper to start with," Rita Reynolds suggested, smiling. "I'm starved."

"Ah yes, to supper. That is most fitting, most fitting indeed. To supper, then."

"Wheel!" exclaimed Rita Reynolds. "This is a real drink."

"I flatter myself that I am a true connoisseur of all forms of liquid refreshment," Jonathan Newcastle told her. "You might almost say that I have devoted a lifetime to the subject."

"Suppose you devote a little more to it and fix me another one of these time-bombs."

"Delighted," Jonathan Newcastle said, glancing at his watch. "Hmmm — ten twenty-five. Almost time for the re-broadcast of Louetta Warrens. Why don't you switch on the radio like a good girl, and I'll brew up some more dynamite in the kitchen."

He hurried out and fixed two more drinks — both of them Scotch and soda this time. Didn't want to spoil his dinner. All the modern psychologists frowned on eating between meals. He was beginning to get excited. The blood was racing through his veins and there was a faint flush on his pale face.

"I got her!" Rita Reynolds sang out. "Catch this."

Jonathan Newcastle sipped his drink thoughtfully. The old fire was beginning to burn in his eyes again. He paced up and down the room, listening.

"Hello everybody! This is Louetta Warrens right here in little old Hollywood bringing you news and views on your very favorite screen celebrities. My first exclusive:

"Jonathan Newcastle, sensational new horror star who scared you SILLY in 'The Return of the Vampire' and 'The Bat in the Belfry' is quite a character in real life as well. You just bet your little old life he is!

"Mr. Newcastle came out of nowhere and my! what a success he has been. He is a stirring tribute to American initiative and free enterprise, take it from your little old reporter. Under a special contract, Mr. Newcastle works only in the evenings when he can really FEEL the parts he plays. The studio has found that it pays to indulge his whims — his flickers have made a pile of gold this year and bid fair to make more in the future.

"Mr. Newcastle regularly buys fresh blood, and surely all of you wonderful people remember that FUNNY picture of Mr. Newcastle posing with the nurse in the blood-bank — one of the cleverest publicity stunts that this little old reporter has heard of in many a moon. Hollywood needs more sound young businessmen like Mr. Newcastle.

"And that's not all! The talented Mr. Newcastle writes his very own movies and is currently contributing his unusual tales to several national magazines. My goodness, his acting and writing are so convincing that they almost make a person believe that such things as vampires really exist. This little old reporter —"

Jonathan Newcastle switched off the radio and turned slowly around, his eyes blazing.

"She's right, you know," he whispered. "Vampires do exist, and I'm one of them."

Rita Reynolds looked up from her drink in mild surprise.

"How's that again?"

"I," Jonathan Newcastle repeated solemnly, "am a vampire."

"Charmed, I'm sure. Where's your coffin?"

"In the bedroom, of course. Do you want to see it?"

"Not before supper, thanks. But I must say you're quite original."

"Bah!" shouted Jonathan Newcastle, pacing rapidly up and down the room. "You little idiot!"

"Now hold on there, my good lad —

"I am not a good lad and I will not hold on there. I've already waited two hundred years, and that's too damned long! The time is now, do you hear?"

"My God, Jonathan, what on earth are you babbling about?"

"Too late to invoke the Deity, my fair damsel. Too late! It's my turn now — I've been kicked around long enough. Oh, the suffering I've endured, the *humiliation* —"

"Now, now, suppose you just calm down and tell Rita all about it."

"Calm down — hah! You fool, you don't know what I've been through, how long I've waited! Oh, I thought I was *so* clever escaping from that terrible captain and all those accursed colonists — until I woke up with one of your stinking cities all around me, with all the lights and machines and *smart* people. Nobody believed in vampires anymore. I was powerless, do you hear? I've never lived in such a *disgusting* civilization."

"You need a rest, Jonathan. You've been working too hard."

"I do *not* need a rest — I need some action! They all thought it was so funny and called me the poor man's Dracula — me, Jonathan Newcastle! They threw their mouldy science in my face and said there were no such things as vampires. Who ever found a vampire in a test tube? Oh, they've been clever these past few hundred years. They've taken their little stinks and atoms and destroyed everything worth having — legends, art, dreams! Where are your dreams now, eh? Where are your dreams?"

"I don't know; they must be around here somewhere . . ."

"Knaves! Varlets! But I showed them — I showed them. I learned. Nobody pushes Jonathan Newcastle around, see? I beat them at their own game. There was still a place left for vampires — on the screen with all the other outmoded corn — in the *movies*! Oh they're beginning to believe in vampires again, all right. You heard Louetta Warrens. And when they do, when they do —!"

"Well, that's all very interesting, I'm sure," Rita Reynolds said, smoothing her skirt down over her sleek legs. "And it is certainly a clever approach. But really, Jonathan, I'm frightfully hungry. You promised . . ."

"Hungry! Hah! I'm hungry too!"

"Well, why don't we eat then? Where's that fancy supper?"

"Supper! That's what I'm talking about — supper!"

"You mean you want *me* for supper?" Rita Reynolds asked incredulously. "Very flattering, I'm sure, but —"

"It won't hurt you, my dear. Not at all. It's like a transfusion, perfectly painless. You'll be as good as new in the morning. I don't want it *all*."

"Just a wee nip, so to speak."

"Yes, yes. Oh, I've waited for this moment!"

"Well, you can keep right on waiting. I'm not having any."

"No," he gloated, "you're not. But *I* am!"

"Oh stop it, Jonathan. I'm hungry."

"Enough!" Jonathan Newcastle thundered. "I thirst!"

Jonathan Newcastle laughed horribly and advanced on his victim. His terrible red eyes burned with savage, age-old fury. He was through fooling around now. This wasn't one of their sugar-coated movies. This was the real thing. The blood pounded through his veins.

"Thirsty," Rita Reynolds said warily. "Yes, I'm thirsty too. Why don't you fix me a drink —"

"Fool, fool," whispered Jonathan Newcastle, stalking forward. "I'm going to fix *me* a drink."

"For God's sake, stop this silly acting. I don't like it and it isn't necessary —"

"Invoking the Deity again! No use, no use. You don't know the proper methods, not at all. Hah — acting! We'll soon see who's acting. Oh, I've waited so long — so long."

Rita Reynolds backed hesitantly into a corner. She looked lovely there, a little confused, her red lips parted. Red! And her throat, her white, pulsing, wonderful throat —

"Now," hissed Jonathan Newcastle.

He reached out, clutching her to him.

"Look, Jonathan!" Rita squirmed, then pushed strongly at his chest. "Not now, damn it! No! You crazy —"

He forced her head back and his white teeth found her throat. Ecstasy . . .

"You clumsy idiot!" the girl panted, twisting out of his grasp. "That hurts!"

"Rita — no! Don't —"

Her indignant hand came around in a perfect arc and connected with a hard, stinging slap. Jonathan Newcastle staggered backward, more astonished than hurt. Slapped! Him, Jonathan Newcastle! It was unbelievable.

"Your technique may be new, Casanova," Rita sneered, "but it's lousy just the same!"

She gathered up her purse and wrap and bounced toward the door, contempt in every line of her lush body.

"Rita!" Jonathan Newcastle moaned hopelessly, hungrily.

"Now," Rita Reynolds informed him, "I've seen everything. But *everything!*" The door slammed behind her.

Jonathan Newcastle sank wearily into an armchair, his head in his hands.

"Foiled," he sighed in utter despair. "Foiled again!"

Many aspects of our enigmatic satellite have long baffled astronomers. The first men to land on the moon will probably find quick answers to these ancient puzzles. But it may be that other, deeper mysteries await such voyagers — mysteries to whose solution human knowledge and experience offer not the smallest clue.

Jetsam

by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

WITH deceptive ease the rocket drifted down, down, the flare of her exhaust vivid against the black sky, the long, downreaching streamer of incandescent gas stirring the fine pumice dust to a coruscating flurry, then, as she lost still more altitude, fusing the almost impalpable powder to a slag that glowed red, red beneath crusty, thickening gray, for minutes after her passing.

Auxiliary jets flared briefly, fiercely, to kill her lateral drift. Again they flared, and a third time. The rocket was all of ten feet above the almost featureless surface when, suddenly, main and auxiliary jets went out like a snuffed candle. She fell — but with an odd, almost nightmarish slowness. She landed as silently as she had come, tilting heavily at first, then slightly, first one way and then the other as the powerful, fluid-damped springs, not unlike the recoil mechanism of a piece of artillery, took the weight and the shock and, after the preliminary swaying and quivering, allowed her to assume an upright position.

She stood there, then, gleaming in the harsh sunlight, a bright ovoid suspended in the tripod that was her vaned landing gear. She should, perhaps, have looked strange, alien — but she did not. She was as much part of the scheme of things as the plain of pumice dust, as the ring craters, as the serrated ridge of the distant mountain range above which hung, seeming almost to touch the jagged peaks, looming huge in the black, diamond spangled sky, the great, cloudy opal that was Earth. She was new and bright, her shell plating barely scarred by her swift, screaming passage through the atmosphere of her mother world — but she belonged. She was new, the first of her kind — but the dream was old, old.

She was part of the dream.

Inside the rocket, inside the cramped living cabin that was also the control room, the men pulled their bulky, cumbersome spacesuits on over their thick, porous plastic underwear. The biggest of them all, the Captain, adjusted clips and zippers stolidly, did not so much as glance out of the now unscreened ports on the shadowed side of the rocket. The Pilot, the Radio Technician and the Engineer tried to follow his phlegmatic example. Only the Navigator — his slight body was still almost that of a boy and he had yet to lose his boyish enthusiasm — stood staring out at the Lunar landscape, his fingers fumbling as he stared, groping vaguely and clumsily through the routine of the airtight fastenings, making foolish mistakes that brought a frown to his commander's face.

This was all part of the dream — and he was living it.

"Sparks," said the Captain, "you'd better make sure that the Stargazer has done his suit up properly. Otherwise I don't know how we shall find our way home."

"We can do without *him*, sir," said the Radio Officer. "Earth's too big to miss — at this range."

"That's what the boys of the garrison'll be saying," laughed the Pilot. "When we get the launching site established."

"If *they* give us time," said the Engineer.

"Enough of that," said the Captain. "We're here, and that's all that matters just now. We have our job to do — preliminary survey, samples of soil and rock, as much exploration as we have time for. As far as our friends on the other side of the Curtain are concerned — this is no more than a scientific expedition. Understand?"

"We understand," said the men.

"Hurry up, Stargazer," said the Captain. "It'll all look better outside."

"Yes, sir," said the Navigator, clicking the last fastenings of his suit tight. Then, almost whispering — "But this is all wrong. It should have been what you said, sir — no more than a scientific expedition . . ."

"Don't be a fool!" snapped the Captain. "You told me yourself that this had always been your dream — ever since, as a kid, you used to read those trashy books with the gaudy covers. You've got your dream . . ."

It's been taken from me, thought the Navigator.

"You've got your dream — now quit whining. Helmets on, men. Test your radios."

There was a babble of conversation, tinny, distorted, then once again the sharp, commanding tones of the Captain.

"The first job," he told his crew, "is the marker." He turned to face the unscreened ports, pointed — his arm bloated and ungainly in the sleeve of his spacesuit. "That mound, there. About a mile away."

Two men lifted the big, square box that was the marker. Two of the others opened the hatch to the airlock, scrambled down into the little compartment, stood with outstretched arms to receive the box. They lowered it carefully to the deck.

"All right, Driver," called the Captain. "Come on out. The airlock will hold only two — and I'm being first on the Moon. The Navigator can be second — so stay where you are, Stargazer."

"I set her down, Captain," said the Pilot in a surly voice.

"Ay — and if it weren't for the fact that you can claim lack of practice I'd have your eagles for the job you made of it. One blast of the auxiliaries should have been sufficient. Thanks to the way you were throwing reaction mass around we may have to lighten ship yet . . . Got the flag, there?"

"Coming down, Captain," called the Engineer, passing the long, cylindrical case to his commander.

"Then close the hatch!"

In the confined space of the airlock the two men, Captain and Navigator, watched the needle of the pressure gauge move jerkily towards the Zero of the scale.

Now, the Navigator was thinking. Now. At last. Crazily, selfishly, he thought, I've only to push him aside when the door opens, and jump . . . And that would mean, he told himself, that I should be the first man on the Moon — and that it'd be my first and only time on the Moon. Besides having twenty years or so in military prison to follow . . .

"What's wrong, Stargazer?" asked the Captain. "You look like a sick goldfish behind that helmet of yours . . . Open the door, now!"

The Navigator turned the controlling wheel, felt the click of released clamps through his thick, clumsy gloves. The door opened inwards. He stared out through the circular aperture at the glaring white plain, the distant ring craters, the black shadow of the ship. The Captain pushed past him, one bulky arm thrust through the carrying sling of the flag case. The big man lowered himself carefully through the opening, his feet searching for and at last finding the toe holds cut in the nearer of the vanes. Moving slowly, cautiously, he vanished from sight. He called, "Come on. The others can send the marker down."

I could still fall, thought the Navigator. Accidentally. And be the first . . .

But he followed the Captain with as much caution as the big man had displayed, pausing for a moment on the ladder while he called to those in the ship, using his radio telephone, to close the outer airlock door by remote control so that the compartment could be repressurized. The last ten feet, however — the Captain was now clear of the ladder, standing arrogantly

with wide spread legs — he dropped, feeling as he slowly fell that this was a dream that he had known all his life, a dream that was at last coming true.

With the Captain he stood and watched the door open again, watched the Pilot and Sparks, identified by the colors of their spacesuits, clamber down the ladder. The airlock door shut again behind them. The four men stood in silence until it opened again and the Engineer stood framed in the orifice.

"Don't forget the marker, Jets!" called the Captain unnecessarily.

The Engineer had not forgotten. Slowly, carefully, he lowered the square box on the end of a piece of line. After the Pilot had received it, unhitched the heavy cord, Jets slowly and carefully pulled up the light gantline, methodically coiling it as he did so.

"Don't bother with that *now!*" called the Captain. "We're all waiting."

At last all five men were standing just clear of the shadow cast by the rocket. It was hot in the sun. The insulation and the cooling arrangements of the suits, thought the Navigator, did not seem to be so efficient as they had been led to believe. Or, perhaps, the effect of heat was psychological rather than physical. In this glaring light, with the sun intolerably bright in the black sky, the mind expected the sensation of heat and would, unlike the instruments that had been used when the suits were tested, do its best to supply the deficiency if no such sensation were apparent.

The Captain was talking. The Navigator, still philosophizing over objectivity and subjectivity, consciously heard only disjointed phrases of the oration that crackled through his helmet speaker.

"... take possession . . . in the name of . . ."

The leader of the expedition pulled the flag from its case, drove the sharp ferrule of the staff deep into the powdery soil. For a brief moment the folds of flimsy plastic fluttered free, for less than a second there was a glimpse of the formal, geometric pattern of blue and white and crimson. Then the flag was no more than two yards of colored material hanging limply from an upright stick, the colors seeming already to be fading in the fierce sunlight.

There should be an atmosphere for this sort of thing, thought the Navigator. *An atmosphere, and wind . . .* Abruptly he began to remember the words of the Captain's speech, the words that, like the ceremony of the flag, were symbols of ideas.

Take possession . . . he thought. *Possession. What right have we to take possession, save on behalf of the human race? We built the rocket, and we brought her here, but the ideas, the technology, behind her building and launching and navigation are the common property of all mankind. Science knows no frontiers. And neither does the dream of which we are lucky enough to be the*

. . . *the end result?* He grinned wryly. "The dream," he whispered aloud, "is turning sour."

"What was that, Stargazer?" asked the Captain sharply.

"Nothing, sir," lied the Navigator.

"Careful, now, men," warned the Captain. "No acrobatics. Shuffle — don't try to jump. You can break a leg or fracture a face plate as easily on the Moon as on Earth."

Sparks and Jets picked up the marker between them, followed the other three men as they trudged slowly and carefully across the plain to the slight mound that the leader had pointed out as the best place for the sign of their safe arrival.

The mound, when they came to it, had more of the appearance of a shallow ring crater. The slope up to its rim was so slight as to be hardly noticeable, but the depression in its centre was more pronounced. It was, thought the Navigator, as though some giant had blown hard and steadily down on to the thick pumice dust. *A giant*, he amended, *with very hot breath* . . . For the dust, especially toward the centre of the crater, was crusted over with a thin, brittle slag that snapped under the men's heavy boots like an ice crust on snow.

Suddenly the Navigator stopped, fell to his knees in the dust. His thick gloved hands scrabbled for the obstacle that had almost tripped him. The thing, when he dragged it up into the light, was badly damaged — by his hands, his clumsy boot, by the intense heat to which it had been subjected . . . *when?*

The Captain, stooping beside him, swore bitterly.

"So we're not the first! *They* have beaten us to it!"

The Navigator got to his feet, holding the crushed and warped artifact gently.

"*They?*" he asked. "*They*, Captain? Who are — or were — *they?* This is, or was, some kind of instrument. As far as I can see its case is metal — and neither we nor our friends on the other side of the Curtain can afford to use metal for anything where wood or plastic would serve . . . Look, too, on the side here . . . Operating instructions? In a script that to any man of Earth would be no more than a meaningless scribble."

"We should have brought along an archaeologist," suggested Sparks, half seriously.

"Can anybody here read Martian?" asked the Pilot.

"Stop that!" snapped the Captain. "This is no laughing matter. It's serious. Somebody has been here before us, may be here now. It is our duty to find out who, and when, and why. You, Sparks and Jets, carry the

marker another mile or so to the northward. To that solitary rock. If it *is* a rock. If it turns out to be some other damned artifact let me know at once. The rest of us . . . dig!"

For a while they found nothing further.

They had no tools but their thick-gloved hands. There were, of course, light shovels in the ship but, somehow, nobody thought of going back for them. The odd sense of urgency that now possessed them would have made the short journey to the rocket and back seem a waste of precious and fast-running-out time. They perspired heavily in their suits, soaking the thick underwear that clad them under the armor. If any one of them worked with his back to the sun for more than a minute or so the transparent plastic of his helmet misted over.

Meanwhile, Sparks and Jets had reached the fresh site for the marker. Sparks's voice drifted tinnily through the helmet speakers. "All ready, Captain. Set to throw North, away from you."

"Good. Any further signs of interlopers?"

"No, sir."

"Then start the fuse and come back here."

As by common consent the three diggers straightened their aching backs, watched their two shipmates trudging towards them over the glaring plain. Behind the jerkily moving figures there was a sudden, brief flare of ruddy light — a flare of light and a dense, black cloud that seemed to spread like, but much faster than, a dribble of ink spilled on clean blotting paper. But it was disappointing, somehow, unspectacular. Against the light blue — or white — or gray-clouded sky of Earth the explosion of the container of finely divided carbon would have had something of drama. Here, with no air to support the particles, it lost most of its effect.

But it will be effective enough back home, thought the Navigator. *Our astronomers will see it. And the others. And then. . .*

"Back to the digging, men," ordered the Captain. "Sparks and Jets — turn to as soon as you get here."

"Sir!" cried the Pilot. "Captain! I've found something! A man!"

It was not a man, of course. It was a spacesuit, not unlike the ones that the explorers were wearing. It had been the property of one who was, by their standards, almost a giant, at least half as tall again as they were. There would have been some justification for the belief that the wearer of the suit was exceptional — but the three other suits turned up beside the first one were equally large.

"Whoever they are," said the Captain at last, "they're big bastards. But humanoid. Two legs, two arms, a head. But big."

"Martians," said the Pilot. "Like I said before."

"How do you make that out, Driver?"

"Well, sir, look at this — I suppose you could call it a crater. Take *our* ship away — and what have you got? The same sort of configuration. The down blast will fuse some of the pumice — and some of it will blow out and away. And if we do have to jettison unessential equipment to lighten ship — it'll be covered over as this was, and we can pick it up on our return."

"But why Martians?" asked the Captain.

"Well, sir, if there are men on Mars, men anything like us, they'll tend to be tall and spindly on account of the feeble gravity. And the men who wore these suits were tall. Furthermore, they'd be more inclined to land on the Moon than Earth. Perhaps their ships, like themselves, were — *are* — too fragile to attempt setting down on a relatively heavy gravity planet. So they came here, and observed, and took photographs maybe — I still think that the thing that the Stargazer found is a camera of some kind — checked up their fuel and found that they couldn't quite reach escape velocity, so dumped all this stuff."

"Ingenuous," said the Captain. "But if the Martians are such gangling weaklings as you imply, then these suits are far too heavy for them. Look at them. Look at the way that they've consistently used metal where a light plastic would have done at least as well."

"Perhaps they *are* too heavy," admitted the Pilot grudgingly. Then, "But, sir, they wouldn't be too heavy for them here, on the Moon!"

The Captain laughed. "Almost you convince me, Driver. Anyhow — it's not our friends from the other side of the Curtain. Unless," he laughed again, "their biologists have produced a new breed of man suitable for Lunar conditions. But I wonder how long ago it was that your Martians were here. I wonder when they are coming back."

"They aren't," said the Navigator. "This must have been a one shot affair. Come this way, sir."

The Captain followed him to the centre of the little crater, looked curiously as his subordinate fell to his knees, and stirred the pumice dust.

"What are you getting at, Stargazer?"

"Just this, sir. The dust. Look at it. Touch it."

"But what . . . ?"

"Under the dust there's a sort of slag — just the same sort of slag that you'll find directly under our jets. It's thick, solid — not like the thin crust out towards the rim. And there's at least half an inch of dust on top of it. On a world with no air, no wind. Just the slow, slow seepage of microscopic particles from the crater slopes over the . . . centuries? No, not centuries. Millennia, perhaps. Or longer."

"A pity," said the Captain. "I was rather looking forward to meeting the Driver's Martians. But who *were* these people?"

The Navigator moved his head inside his helmet until he found the tube of his little fresh water tank with his lips, took a short, unsatisfying sip before replying. Something — some suspicion, some fear — had made his mouth suddenly dry.

"I don't know, Captain," he said. "I don't *know*."

"But you think."

"Yes, I think. I have a . . . feeling about all this. But I'd sooner keep it to myself until we have more evidence."

"As you say. But we must return to the ship soon. I'm just about dehydrated. Ah, here are Sparks and Jets to bear a hand."

Slowly the pile of salvaged equipment grew. Another, smaller camera, less badly damaged than the first one, metal oxygen — or so the explorers assumed — cylinders, two glass bottles, their labels still intact, still displaying with clarity the queer, unreadable script of those who had left them there. A pair of binoculars, a pile of clothing that crumbled to fine powder when handled, three sheath knives still encased in a dry, brittle integument that had once been leather, a metal case full of wiring.

It was the Navigator who found the book. A magazine it was, rather, a flimsy affair of paper that had once been glossy, of pictures that still retained some faint traces of color. When uncovered it was open — flung down carelessly, perhaps, or, it could be, left that way by the long-dead astronaut who had thumbed with clumsy, gloved hands through its pages.

It was open at the picture of a girl, naked, reclining on what could have been a grassy lawn. There were trees in the background. There was a dog beside his mistress. Under the picture were words in the unknown script.

"Look," said the Navigator. "Here's the proof. No freak of parallel evolution could have produced that woman. Or that dog. Or those trees."

"Proof of *what*, Stargazer?"

"That the people who had to lighten ship before they could return came from the Earth, *our* Earth."

"Hogwash!" exploded the Captain.

"No, sir, it's not. It was, of course, a long time ago."

"So they had rockets, and photography, and printing in the Middle Ages? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"No, sir. Not the Middle Ages. Before the Flood."

"Come off it, Stargazer. This is too much, even from you."

"Then how else do you account for all this? Look at it this way, sir. All mythologies — *all* — have a legend of the Deluge, of the Flood that

destroyed all life save for a chosen few. Those few may have been favored by the gods, they may have been just lucky. Whatever the way of it was — they were our forebears. And the Flood itself — was it a flood as we know it? A mere abnormally high tide, a mere bursting by some river of its bounds? Remember, sir, that all peoples, North and South, East and West, have the Flood in their mythologies. The Flood — and the legend of lost continents . . .”

“Go on.”

“There was a Flood, and there *were* continents — populous, highly civilized — that are now lost. It’s all part of the same story. A violent, seismic upheaval, as a result of which great land masses went down with all hands, as a result of which new lands rose from the ocean beds.”

“These people, if there ever were such people,” said the Captain, “were scientists. They had reached at least the same level as we ourselves. One would think that they could have coped with such a disaster.”

“Not if they, themselves, caused it. It is reasonable to suppose, Captain, that a certain level of technology produces both the spaceship and the atom bomb. Imagine the effect of, say, twenty hydrogen bombs exploded along geological fault lines.”

“But it’s rather strange,” said the Pilot, “that they never came back here. It’s odd that this upheaval of yours should have occurred just after the first successful Lunar flight.”

“Is it so odd? Perhaps they, like us, had a Curtain with two sides to it. Perhaps they, like us, intended using this world for military purposes — and the radio signal announcing their safe and successful landing on the Moon was the detonator for the Big Bang. . . .”

There was silence as all five men stared at the low-hanging Earth.

“All theories,” said the Captain at last, heavily. “Pick up what you can of this . . . junk, men, and carry it back to the ship. We’re only serving officers of the Empress-Mother doing a job of work — we’ll leave the fabrication of fairy stories to the scientists when we get back to Earth.”

As he stooped to pick up the pair of binoculars he found one more trifle half buried in the pumice dust. He scooped it up carefully in his gloved hand. It was fragile, mere rubbish, a discarded container that had held something and which was now empty. There was a flimsy, inner box of metal foil, an even flimsier outer box of paper with an external layer of some transparent substance which had preserved the script and the picture of the familiar animal that had once symbolized — *something*.

The Captain stared at it.

“A camel,” he said at last, wonderingly. “A camel. I’d like to know what used to be in this packet . . .”

Perhaps the best way to introduce this grim morality for parents who spoil their children is to remark that the bending of the twig does not always affect the inclination of just a single tree.

Random Sample

by T. P. CARAVAN

IF YOU DON'T give me another piece of candy I'll cry. You'd be surprised how loud I can cry. Mother wouldn't like that.

Thank you. I just love candy.

I'm very polite for my age; everybody says so. I can get more candy that way. Old ladies are best. I'm also a very intelligent little girl, but I suppose you found that out from your tests. They gave me the same kind of tests, but they didn't give me any candy, so I was bad and didn't answer anything right.

Thank you. I'll take two this time. Do you have any hard candies? The heat's melted these chocolates a little.

My father says to get all I can out of you, because all you Viennese head-thumpers are quacks. He says you cost an awful lot of money. He says only an old fraud would have a beard like a billy goat. He says . . .

Are you getting angry?

All right, then, if you give me just one more piece of candy I'll tell you all about it.

Merci. That's French, you know.

My brother Johnny and I were out in the back yard, stomping ants, when the space ship came down. It's fun sometimes to watch ants, they run around so hopefully going about their business, carrying little bits of twigs and things in their mouths; and they don't even seem to know you're there until your foot just about touches them. Then they run away, waving their feelers before they squish. But the big red ants are the really good ones. You can jump right spang on them and they don't even seem to notice it. I guess they sink into the ground a little ways, because if you pound one between two rocks he squishes without any trouble. They taste funny. Once Johnny saw a red one fighting a black one and they kept on fighting until he burned them both up with his magnifying glass.

Will you buy me a magnifying glass if I tell you about it? I'd just love to

have a magnifying glass. I bet the ant thinks the sun is spread out over the whole sky. I bet he thinks the whole world is burning up. I bet it hurts. I bet I could burn up more ants than Johnny can, even though I'm a whole year younger. He's ten.

Please, can I have a magnifying glass? Please? Please? Can I? Can I? I'll cry.

When can I have it?

Thank you.

It was his birthday so I let him take the ones near the ant hill. I'm really very generous at times. You let them get almost down the hole before you jump on them. That's the most fun. I was watching one I'd pulled the legs off, waiting to see if the others would eat it, when Johnny yelled for me to come quick and I went running over. He showed me one ant carrying another on its back, trying to get it down into the ant hill before we squished it. We were just about to stomp on its little head when we heard the noise in the sky. It was the kind of skreeky sound I make when I pull my fingernail along the blackboard in school and make old Miss Cooper get the shivers. I hate Miss Cooper. She doesn't give me any candy — thank you — and I never answer any questions for her.

We looked up and saw the rocket ship coming down for a landing in the woods. It didn't look like a ship to me, but that's what Johnny says it was. It looked like a big washing machine to me. Father says it was a hallucination — I like big words — but he didn't even see it, so how could he know?

Sometimes I hate Father. Are you writing that down? Was that the right thing to say? Can I have some more candy?

Thank you.

This is very good, even if it is melted. I should think you could afford to have your office air conditioned, then the candy wouldn't melt at all. If you were smart you'd think of these things.

What happened? I've told it over and over but nobody believes me. Isn't that sad? I don't think I'll tell anybody else about it.

The whole box? For me? Thank you. I just love chocolates.

Your beard isn't really much like a billy goat's.

We saw it come down in the woods and we ran over to the place. Nobody else was there. The grass and underbrush was burning a little but they were putting it out, and when they saw us they stopped still and made little noises to each other. I held up my hand and I said, "I'm queen here. You must all bow down." And Johnny held up his hand and said, "I'm king." He never thinks of anything for himself.

I hate them. They didn't bow down to me. One of them picked up a squirrel that had been burned a little when they landed, and he was petting

it and putting something on the burned place, and he didn't pay any attention to me. I hated him most of all, so I went over and kicked him. He was smaller than Johnny, so Johnny kicked him too. I kicked him first, though, and he was just my size.

What did they look like? They didn't look like little old billy goats.

They took us inside their space ship, and they started to give us some tests like the one you gave me. They were very simple tests, but I didn't like them so I got them all wrong. Johnny got them all wrong too, because I told him I'd scratch his eyes out if he didn't. I remember some of them. They drew little triangles with boxes on two of the sides and then they gave me the pen and waited to see what I'd do. I fooled them. I took the pen and threw ink all over them. It wasn't a pen, exactly, but it was like one. Then they held up one little block, then two, then three, then four. They did this a few times, and then they held up one block, then two. Then they waited for me to pick up three. I picked up all the blocks and hit them over the head with them. I had a lot of fun. I was very bad.

They got Johnny off in a corner, and before you could say boo! he was telling them about all the people he'd killed in the war. He wasn't really in the war, of course, but he likes to pretend he was. He likes television best when they kill lots of people. I don't think they really knew what he was talking about, but they looked as if they did. He's a very good actor.

I suppose they thought we were grownups; they were pretty much the same size we are. Anyway, they paid a lot of attention to him, so I went over and punched him a couple of times. I'm afraid we broke up the insides of their space ship a little.

They looked pretty mad. I guess they were disgusted with Johnny; a lot of people are. I always try to make a good impression on strangers, even when they don't give me any candy, so I took some of them outside and showed them how to stomp ants. It was very funny. One of them got sick. Johnny and I were still jumping up and down, stomping ants, when they took off. I hated them. They were nasty; they didn't bow down to me.

That's all. Nothing else happened.

Father says not to take up too much of your expensive old time. He says no honest man could afford a penthouse for his office. You have a very nice view, don't you? You can see all over the city from here.

My, isn't it hot? I wish I had a refrigerator to keep my candy in.

Look there. Look at the fires springing up across the river. Aren't they pretty? Look. Look. And some on this side.

Take me away from here. It's too hot.

Look at the sun. Look at it. It's spreading out over the whole sky. It's burning up the city. Billy goat, help me! Save me. I'm sorry I was bad.

Mr. Nelson, a close observer of the odder patterns of human behavior — as witness his report of that strange malady of the mind, narapoia — chooses here to consider certain aspects of life, love and commerce as these may be carried on some twenty years from now. And while 1970's traffickers in soap may push the advertising of their wares to a length of absurdity today's copywriters may well envy, Mr. Nelson thinks that the emotional stresses and strains of love will be no easier (or harder) for the young man of the future to endure.

Soap Opera

by ALAN NELSON

NO HISTORY of that dizzy decade, the 1970's, would be complete without mention of the celebrated "Schizoid Skywriter" episode which threw the city of San Francisco into such a turmoil for three absurd days in September 1973 and provided more confusion and garbled news copy than any other event in the whole period. Briefly the facts are these.

On August 27, 1973 a fuming little man with a shock of white hair and tan shoes, strutted down a long corridor, pushed open a door marked "Advertising" and buzzing like an angry wasp, made for the window, slammed it open, leaned out and frowned skyward.

This was H. J. Spurgle, owner and founder of the H. J. Spurgle Soap Company (manufacturers of the all-purpose household cleanser known as GIT!) and his scowl was directed at three freshly skywritten slogans hovering smokily above the San Francisco skyline:

GIT GETS GRIME
GRIME DOESN'T PAY — GET GIT!
GIT'S GOT GUTS

Close behind him was his private secretary Nita Kribbert, a luscious brunette with a careful hairdo, who was uttering soothing noises.

"Who's responsible for *that!*" Spurgle snarled as he withdrew his head from the window and pointed a gnarled finger upward. His face was unnaturally red, as though scrubbed too vigorously.

Eleven advertising staff members blinked anxiously and peered out.

"I am."

Spurgle whirled and glowered at the gaunt, uneasy young man in a leather jacket who had just entered the room.

"Well, that's just about the worst skywriting I've ever seen," Spurgle growled, walking slowly toward him with a watch in his hand. "Your letters started falling apart in less than 30 seconds."

"But the breeze, sir. . . ." Everett Mordecai interposed, glancing miserably at Nita.

"Breeze or no breeze," Spurgle thundered. "I'm not paying you to trail a lot of smoke across the sky that nobody can read. Why I could do better with a 30 cent cigar. Tune the smoke mixture up a bit, man! I want more permanence in those letters! Understand? Permanence!"

Wretchedly, Mordecai glanced first at the angry little man, then at the lovely Nita and wondered if this was the end of everything. Hired five months ago as a research chemist, everything had gone wrong. The very first week he'd blown up a small laboratory in an unauthorized experiment designed to produce a "quick action" hand soap. Transferred into accounting, his experimental ink eradicator had almost completely dissolved an entire ledger before the horrified section chief. Brief hitches in sales and traffic proved equally disastrous.

And now this miserable assignment as skywriter was about to blow up too. And right in front of Nita. The prospect was unendurable. For months he'd been following the gorgeous and elusive creature around like a stunned and abject slave — now she'd marry him, now she wouldn't. I can't stand a failure, she'd told him early in the game. Give me a man on his way up. But the harder he tried, the worse things got. Already he'd lost ten pounds. Already the pit of his stomach frizzled from morning to night like a perpetually erupting test tube.

"Permanence!" Spurgle was shouting. "Is that clear?"

Wretchedly, Mordecai watched the angry little man bounce out of the office. Nita remained a moment.

"Keep trying," she smiled encouragingly.

After Mordecai wrote his usual message, GOT GRIT? — GET GIT!, at 2000 feet, he fluttered the helicopter in, crawled out of the cockpit, and walked over to Nita and Mr. Spurgle who were waiting for him by the side of the hangar.

"Everett!" Nita cried, moving forward to meet him. "For two weeks I've been trying to reach you! Where on earth have you been?"

"Leave of absence," Mordecai answered tensely. He was thinner, haggard; great dark pouches quivered beneath both eyes.

"I have something to tell you," she began.

"Perhaps, young man," Spurgle interrupted impatiently, "you'll tell me what this is all about." He glanced at an inter-office memo fluttering in his hand. "Just *why* is it so urgent that I be on the landing field this morning at 11?"

Mordecai hauled out a stop watch, turned his eyes upward to the slogan he'd just written.

"Possibly you'd like to time *these* letters. . . ."

Automatically Spurgle gazed up too. The letters, still firm, still strong and perfectly formed, seemed to be settling earthward, undisturbed by the brisk breeze that scudded across the field.

"They're coming down," Nita gasped.

Spurgle frowned and stared, waiting for them inevitably to dissolve and disappear.

But they didn't.

Like great soggy balloons, the letters gradually descended, becoming larger and clearer as they drifted closer, and finally when they landed on the field, bounced gently several times and lay quiet.

Silently the three walked over to the slogan. Spurgle kicked at the letter G in grr! It was a monstrous white thing, ten feet thick, half a city block long, composed of a flexible, elastic substance that resembled something between jello and foam rubber, yet which was opaque and so light that despite its size, Mordecai could pick the entire letter up with one hand. He balanced the G on his palm a moment.

"You asked for permanence . . ."

Then Mordecai tilted his hand; the giant letter slid off, bounced crazily on the ground, shuddered like some monstrous coiled snake and lay gently quivering. Nita found the dot to the I — a tremendous white sphere the size of a two car garage — and was bouncing it off the side of the hangar.

Spurgle frowned and rubbed his jowls.

"What's this stuff made of?" he finally asked, grabbing a corner of the G and compressing an entire cross bar into his hand. When he released the pressure it sprang back to its original shape.

"Oh, it's just a little synthetic rubber derivative with a dash of neoprene and a couple of jiggers of koroseal . . ."

"Never mind," Spurgle cried, growing more and more irritable. He withdrew a knife, opened it, started sawing away at an edge of the T. "I'll send it to the lab, have it analyzed."

But the stuff just wouldn't cut. Twice Spurgle plunged the knife into the rubbery substance up to his armpits, but it was like trying to puncture a sponge with a potato masher.

"Well, I must admit, it's a neat trick," he growled uncertainly. "But unfortunately I decided only last week to ditch the whole skywriting campaign. After all, this is 1973 and skywriting is pretty much a thing of the past. Clever twist, this — I must admit. But I'm afraid it just doesn't have any impact. No one skywrites anymore."

He glanced at his watch, then turned to Nita.

"Good lord, Nita. You'd better pick up the tickets. We've got exactly 25 minutes."

Nita lingered just long enough to touch Mordecai gently on the sleeve.

"Keep trying," she said smiling, then hurried off across the field.

"As I say, Mordecai," Spurgle continued. "It's a nice try but I'm afraid you have another stinker here. When I get back from my honeymoon I'll try to find another spot for you — the shipping department perhaps. . . ."

"Honeymoon?" Mordecai echoed with a premonition of disaster.

"Why, yes," Spurgle said, allowing his face to relax a moment as he gazed after the disappearing figure of Nita. "Nita and I are on our way to Palm Springs right now. But I shouldn't say anything about it. It's a secret . . ."

Dazedly, Mordecai watched Spurgle stride off toward the administration building; then with a low moan that seemed to rack his whole body, he hauled off and booted the exclamation point clear off the landing field.

Those are the events that lead up to the three wildest and most bizarre days in San Francisco history. Whether Mordecai's subsequent actions were the result of a frustrated personality gone berserk or merely a last-ditch attempt to "keep trying" has been debated for nearly twenty years.

The San Francisco *Chronicle* dated September 14, 1973, carried this dispatch on page one:

Residents in scattered portions of the city were surprised early this morning by the appearance of huge rubbery letters leaning against the eaves of houses, clogging backyards and blocking street car tracks. In the downtown area, a huge elastic "O" ringed the Shell building like a quoit on a peg and was wedged at the sixteenth floor by an extended flag pole. The Atlas Foundry reported one of its huge brick smoke stacks obstructed by a large white sphere.

Meteorologist Fred Ballard could not immediately identify the source of the phenomenon but thought the objects might be by-products of a new atomic development project located somewhere in the vicinity.

Toward morning the drizzle seemed to be increasing and had already created a nuisance in several sections due to difficulty in disposing of them. Impossible to cut, burn or deflate, the letters could only be moved; and the big ques-

tion was — where? Vacant lots in certain districts were loaded and police reported squabbles breaking out between neighbors over tossing the things over back fences . . .

It was not until the second morning that San Franciscans discovered to their ire that the phenomenon — still falling steadily — was not an atomic by-product, but an old advertising stunt with a new twist. For while previously Mordecai had dropped individual letters, now he was connecting them up in a flourishing Pelman script; slogans fell as a unit, and all too clearly people could read the GET GIT!'s as they drifted downward and covered the city like a blanket of snow.

Moreover, the size was increasing. A single GIT's GOT GUTS, for instance, fitted perfectly into Van Ness avenue from Golden Gate to Post street, and SCOUR WITH POWER — GIT's GOT IT! which landed upend in Kezar stadium stuck out like a spoon in a bowl of soup.

The angry, protesting howl that welled up that second morning — the morning of "Frantic Friday" — was a demonstration of civic indignation that will probably never be equalled. Inevitably, the Spurgle Soap Company was on the receiving end of the point-blank blast.

Forty thousand irate housewives dialled Spurgle's almost simultaneously, and the four benumbed operators on duty at the plant, overwhelmed by the avalanche, simply laid down their headpieces, watched the flashing switch-board in awe a few moments longer, then quietly slunk out.

Outside, an ugly crowd estimated at between 10 and 20,000 milled beyond the wire fence, shouting and occasionally heaving bricks into the yard.

It was not until almost 11 A.M. that the citizen's committee of seven headed by Mayor Randolph Rockwell, a rotund man with vertical lines in his face, shouldered its way through this crowd, and at length strode into the panelled office of H. J. Spurgle. They found Spurgle in a cold rage, rocking himself gently in his swivel chair, face nearly purple, trying desperately to control a fit of the shakes.

"Who's responsible for *that*?" Rockwell snarled, going immediately to the window and pointing a finger skyward. "I demand you put a stop to this outrageous publicity stunt at once!"

It was a moment before Spurgle could find his voice.

"Put a stop to it!" he screamed. "Don't you think I'd like to? First it ruined my wedding. Now, my business. Put a stop to it? HOW?"

"Call your man down, that's how."

Spurgle cackled mirthlessly.

"*You* call him down. The man's gone completely mad! The only way you're going to get him down is shoot him down."

A man with a briefcase stepped forward.

"Nevertheless, Spurgle," he stated in cold, judicial tones, "as city attorney I must warn you the man is on your pay roll and therefore we're holding you legally responsible."

"What do you mean — legally responsible!" Spurgle shouted. "Spurgle company has a perfectly valid 1973 city skywriting license. It's not legal responsibility I'm worried about. I'm in the clear there." He rummaged a moment in the desk, came up with a document, tossed it across to the city attorney who examined it carefully. Presently he began to shake his head and frown.

"This seems to be in perfect order," he said. "Frankly, gentlemen, I'm at a loss to know just what ordinance *is* being violated, except possibly the anti-smog regulation. This whole thing, unfortunately, appears perfectly legal."

There was an embarrassing silence.

"How long can he stay up there?" someone asked.

"Months," Spurgle answered sadly. "Both our helicopters are atomic powered."

"But the supply of . . . of rubber or whatever it is he uses," Mayor Rockwell cried plaintively. "Surely that isn't inexhaustible. What about that, Cliff — you're City Engineer."

"Haven't had time yet to analyze the stuff," a stolid man in a blue serge answered. "But I can tell you this. There's more solid rubber in an ordinary golf ball than there is in an entire slogan. It's like the sugar in those sugar fluff candy cones they sell at the beach — a little goes a long way. If the man happened to take along three or four hundred pounds of old rubber tires, for instance, there's no telling how long he could spin them out."

"Maybe we'd *better* shoot him down then," Chief of Police Guire said.

"No! No!" the city attorney replied testily. "Didn't you hear me say he's committing no crime? Writing obscene literature in public places — yes. But shoot him down for that and the city would have a suit on its hands for half a million dollars."

Mayor Rockwell who had been looking flustered, stopped chewing on the earpiece of his spectacles, cleared his throat and turned to a thin, frowning, man.

"Well, Ed, it looks as if this is *your* baby."

"Very definitely it is *not* a matter of Civilian Defense," the man answered irritably. "We're not being attacked. Personally I think it's up to the Civil Aeronautics Commission."

"Absolutely not!" a short man answered from the background. "This is a

local matter, pure and simple. Perhaps the gentleman from the Better Business Bureau has a suggestion . . .”

“Just get that madman down!” Spurgle shrilled.

Meanwhile, outside, the city wallowed deeper and deeper in the torrent of slogans. Toward afternoon, Mordecai, obviously tiring of the shopworn phrases began making up some of his own:

GIT CONTAINS TRI-SODIUM PHENO-BARBITO-HYPERCLOROSOL AND IS MADE BY REACTING POLYHYDRIC ALCOHOLS WITH POLYBASIC ACIDS, for instance, extended from the east slope of Twin Peaks all the way down Market street to the Embarcadero.

And for a brief spell, possibly under the influence of the bottle, there rained a strangely garbled series of messages like:

NITA KRIBBERT IS FAST, EASY, SAFE AND DOESN'T REDDEN THE HANDS.

H. J. SPURGLE REQUIRES ABSOLUTELY NO RINSING.

HAPPY WEDDING DAY TO GIT!

By dusk of the second day, the downtown area was completely paralyzed. All traffic had stopped. Rubber letters completely smothered every street, lay crazily across roof tops, stacked up on one another like a gigantic, disordered wood pile. Only the peaks of the highest buildings were visible.

The following eye-witness account by Edgar Fogleman, Wells Fargo bank clerk, is quoted from the November, 1973, issue of *Glimpse*:

“. . . I wasn't sure whether the bank was going to open or not but I started walking to work anyway. It got worse as I approached the financial district.

“I don't know how to describe it except it was like walking through a bubble bath. There was plenty of light and air down there but it was very easy to get lost because you'd go to turn a corner, then find it wasn't a corner, but just the end of a letter.

“No one was scared or panicky because the things were easy to move if they got in your way — but everybody was confused and very mad.

“When I got to Montgomery and California some guy in an arm band told me every able-bodied man in the district was being drafted to haul the things out of there. I was assigned to a crew with three others and we started dragging one of the big things through a narrow lane they'd cleared toward the water front. They weren't too hard to carry but very awkward and hard to get a hold of.

“After about four hours the Embarcadero got so jammed we couldn't even get close to the bay any more. We hung around a while longer, then the man in charge told us to go home, that they were going to try to haul the things down the peninsula by auto caravan. . . .”

Two hours previously, the mayor of Oakland just across the bay, in a gaudy display of civic friendship, dispatched to the scene over 500 boy scouts who were having their annual jamboree on the shores of Lake Merritt. The following excerpt is quoted from a letter later written by Scoutmaster Jerrold Danielsen to the National Chairman of Boy Scouts of America and printed with the permission of Mr. Danielsen:

"... wish to take exception to your letter reprimanding the Hedgehog Patrol for 'conduct unbecoming to Scouts,' as you put it. It is true our boys became lost and wandered about for over three hours, but I think it is to their credit they didn't lose their heads completely. After all, being lost in a forest and being lost in a maze of rubber letters are two different things — I might remind you it was impossible to cut notches in the trunks of these slogans.

"As to your statement about 'building campfires on every street corner and adding to the general confusion,' I will point out these campfires were used to make hunter's stew and boosted the morale of over fifteen hungry San Franciscans (by actual count) with whom it was shared.

"So far as your claims that . . ."

The city police had, of course, long since been given orders to "find and bring down that madman."

There was little difficulty in finding him.

Sergeant Mulrooney reported back within the hour that Mordecai was barrelling around at 5000 feet, trailing a funny looking liquid rubber that solidified almost immediately.

"But how we going to *get* him down if we can't shoot him down?" he asked. "We can't get close enough to force him down — all he has to do is duck behind one of his own sentences."

And by nightfall of "Frantic Friday" Mordecai not only was still roaming the skies, but had added a new ingredient — fluorescence.

BRIGHTEN YOUR SINKS AND WASH BASINS WITH

H. J. SPURGLE.

The slogan glowed with a purple brilliance and finally nestled obscenely against the Museum of Modern Art. From then on the night sky was brilliant with great glowing gobs of green, orange and vermillion which settled and infested everything with a weird and garish phosphorescence.

And then at 5:17 A.M. on the third day, when all San Francisco lay under a quivering blanket of technicolor, there was an abrupt cessation of descending slogans. A pregnant lull ensued for a full five minutes. Suddenly a different type of message flashed across the sky.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT TO FOLLOW

Several hundred thousand anxious eyes scanned the blackness above, waiting hopefully. Finally it came.

GET SCRAMMO — THE NEW SOAP POWDER

It was closely followed by another.

SCRAMMO MAKES GIT! SCRAM

The several hundred thousand watchers, not understanding, not caring much more, their eyes strained and bloodshot, turned away in weary disgust and took once more to the task of digging out.

That was the last message ever to be skywritten across San Francisco's skyline.

Perhaps the denouement can best be described by reprinting an excerpt of an interview with Millie Speicher, housewife residing at 2390 Washington street, as published in the September 23, 1973, issue of the *San Francisco News*:

. . . I was at 14th and Market about 9 A.M. Saturday when I noticed this vacant warehouse with a big sign reading: "GET YOUR SCRAMMO HERE."

I remembered the slogan earlier this morning about SCRAMMO and went in. The place was crammed with stacks of five pound packages in plain paper sacks. The clerk told me to buy one and try the contents on one of the GIT! slogans.

Outside, I opened the package and sprinkled a little of it on the nearest GIT! slogan. Instantly, the whole thing disintegrated with a little pop. I told some other people about it and in less than fifteen minutes there was a line in front of that store clear to the ferry building.

By noon that day I didn't see a single GIT! sign. All that was left was a thin layer of gray powder that covered almost everything but which the firemen washed down the street drains with fire hoses. It really is wonderful stuff . . .

Thus ended the "Schizoid Skywriter" incident, an episode San Francisco has tried vainly to live down for twenty years.

There are those who insist that Mordecai really did go off his rocker, that his were the actions of a madman, and that he came to a merciful end when his helicopter was damaged and plunged somewhere into the Pacific.

But others are not quite so sure.

They point to some rather significant facts:

First, that the manufacturers of grt! really were forced out of business by popular demand.

Second, that SCRAMMO, which skyrocketed to popularity after its dramatic performance on GIT! signs that third day, appeared at a suspiciously apropos time.

Third, that the newly formed SCRAMMO company was operated for years thereafter by a dummy board of directors, the real power, rarely, if ever, making a public appearance.

As for Nita Kribbert, the following two excerpts may be of interest, the first of which appeared in the San Francisco *Examiner* classified section under Personals on November 14, 1973:

EV! WHERE ARE YOU? HOW COULD YOU BELIEVE I EVER INTENDED MARRY-
ING H.J.? ALL A HORRIBLE MIX-UP. CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING. PLEASE
CALL! — KRIBBIE

The second appeared in San Francisco *Night Life* (February, 1973):

"... yes, I'm on my way to be married. But I can't tell you where or to whom or anything! It's a big secret! All I can say is that he's young and handsome and on his way up.

"Is it true that I once started to elope with H. J. Spurge? Absolutely NOT! We *did* start out for a wedding but not to *mine*. H. J. was on his way to marry someone he met in Arizona and he asked me to accompany him in the capacity of private secretary and later to fill in as bridesmaid. Then the bombardment of GIT! slogans broke loose and everything was off. How do these stupid rumors get started anyway?

"Right now I'm very happy . . ."

One other footnote to the whole bizarre sequence: Only two years ago, Consumers' Research had this to say about SCRAMMO:

. . . Hysteria buying of SCRAMMO by housewives zoomed this product into one of the fastest selling household soap products on the market, a position it has maintained for over fifteen years. This, despite our own laboratory tests which have repeatedly shown that SCRAMMO is entirely worthless on sinks, tubs, enamel, porcelains, linoleum or apparently anything else save for the purpose it was originally intended: destroying GIT! slogans.



As plausible and fascinating as his accounts of Robinson Crusoe, Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild are Daniel Defoe's detailed relations of the doings of the Devil. As with The Friendly Demon (F&SF, February 1951), we have no notion whether this excerpt from THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE DEVIL is unusually lively fact-reporting or unusually convincing fiction; we simply offer it as a fine illustration of the inexhaustible ingenuity of the Enemy.

The Devil at St. Bennet Fynk

by DANIEL DEFOE

THERE LIVED in the parish of St. Bennet Fynk, near the Royal Exchange, an honest poor widow woman who, her husband being lately dead, took lodgers in her house. That is, she let out some of her rooms in order to lessen her own charge of rent. Among the rest, she let her garrets to a working watch wheel maker, or one concerned in making the movements of watches, and who worked to those shopkeepers who sell watches, as is usual.

It happened that a man and woman went up to speak with this movement maker upon some business which related to his trade. And when they were near the top of the stairs, the garret door where he usually worked being wide open, they saw the poor man (the watchmaker or wheelmaker) had hanged himself upon a beam which was left open in the room a little lower than the plaster or ceiling. Surprised at the sight the woman stopped and cried out to the man, who was behind her on the stairs, that he should run up and cut the poor creature down.

At that very moment comes a man hastily from another part of the room which they upon the stairs could not see, bringing a joint stool in his hand, as if in great haste, and sets it down by the wretch that was hanged; and getting up as hastily upon it pulls a knife out of his pocket, and taking hold of the rope with one of his hands beckons to the woman and the man behind her with his head, as if to stop and not come up — showing them the knife in his other hand, as if he was just going to cut the poor man down.

Upon this, the woman stopped a while, but the man who stood on the joint stool continued with his hand and knife as if fumbling at the knot, but did not yet cut the man down. At which the woman cried out again

and the man behind her called to her. "Go up," he said, "and help the man upon the stool!" supposing something hindered.

But the man upon the stool made signs to them again to be quiet and not come on, as if saying, "I shall do it immediately." Then he made two strokes with his knife as if cutting the rope, and then stopped again. And still the poor man was hanging and consequently dying. Upon this, the woman on the stairs cried out to him, "What ails you? Why don't you cut the poor man down?"

And the man behind her, having no more patience, thrust her by and said to her, "Let me come. I'll warrant you I'll do it!" — and with that runs up and forward into the room to the man.

But when he came there, behold! the poor man was there hanging, but no man with a knife or joint stool or any such thing to be seen. All that was specter and delusion, in order no doubt to let the poor creature that had hanged himself perish and expire.

The man was so frightened and surprised that with all the courage he had before, he dropped on the floor as one dead. And the woman at last was fain to cut the poor man down with a pair of scissors, and had much to do to effect it.

As I have no room to doubt the truth of this story, which I had from persons on whose honesty I could depend, so I think it needs very little trouble to convince us who the man upon the stool must be; and that it was the devil who placed himself there in order to finish the murder of the man whom he had, devil-like, tempted before and prevailed with to be his own executioner. Besides, it corresponds so well with the devil's nature and with his business, namely, that of a murderer, that I never questioned it. Nor can I think we wrong the devil at all to charge him with it.

N.B. I cannot be positive in the remaining part of the story: namely, whether the man was cut down soon enough to be recovered, or whether the devil carried his point and kept off the man and woman till it was too late. But be it which it will, it is plain he did his devilish endeavor and stayed until he was forced to abscond again.



This moving autobiography of a rocket pilot gives us a keenly intuitive glimpse of the future. A future that will break sharply with tradition and bring us an entirely new model of hero.

The Space Man

by OLIVER SAARI

SEEING the restaurant full of people, Lantry felt a foolish panic, a strong impulse to rush back up to the hotel room. He was relieved to find the big man already seated at the table.

"Hi, Lantry," said Burns, his broad face breaking into a smile of genuine friendliness. "I was beginning to think you'd fallen through that open window you're so fond of."

"I've been putting off coming down here," sighed Lantry, sinking into a chair with obvious relief.

"We could go up —"

"No. The Doctor says I have to crawl out of my hole sometime."

He tried to ignore the fact that people were turning to look at him, their whispers spreading like ripples through the room. They were nice people, curious but friendly, and Lantry knew he'd remember their interest. But now it was hard to take.

"How about a drink?" Burns said, finishing the olive off a martini.

"We'd better eat first," said Lantry cautiously. "Tonight I want to stay conscious."

He ordered a steak, thinking: tomorrow it's S-rations and the centrifuge — after which space itself would be a relief, except for the loneliness. They ate in silence. Lantry didn't feel like talking now . . . what was left to say? How it felt to be going out there alone again? The words would be hard to find for that.

"Tired?" Burns seemed to read his mind the way he often did.

"A little."

"We don't have to talk," Burns said, leaning his massive frame back in a chair that creaked threateningly. "Lord knows you've given me stuff for a dozen articles already. Let's just call this a send-off. Isn't there anyone else you'd have liked to see?"

"No. My father and mother both passed away during my last trip."

"You've mentioned a brother."

"I saw him at the farm. He couldn't take time off to come here — it's harvest time."

Burns looked down at his big knuckles engulfing the martini glass.

"What made you start it, Lantry?" he said without looking up.

"I don't know," Lantry stalled. "What makes bullfighters fight bulls?"

"Sure. 'Who pushed Columbus?'"

"It isn't the same thing," snapped Lantry, irritated.

"All right, then, who pushed Lantry?"

"Sorry, Jeff. I'm a little touchy on that Columbus stuff." He remembered a little rural school, a long time ago, where he'd written a schoolboy's essay on exploring space, and the kids had named him Chris Columbo.

"Tell me about it," said Burns.

Lantry could feel himself responding to the question. It was one he'd asked himself often enough — and sometimes he hadn't known the answer!

"How about you, Burns? Would you go if you weren't — you know — if you had the chance?"

"Yes!"

The other's big, powerful frame was tense, his muscles moving under the light suitcoat. Lantry winced as he saw the knuckles turn white over the martini glass. The wide-set brown eyes had a deep look, like space itself. *Now I know why I liked the articles he wrote*, Lantry thought. Suddenly he wanted very badly to talk.

"Do you want the whole thing — story of my life? It might be dull."

"I'll take the chance," said Burns.

O.K. (said Lantry), you asked for it.

I was the second of two children. That isn't many for a North Dakota farm family, but my Pa got taken sick about the time I was born. My brother was five years older than I, a bookish sort of kid, always with his face buried in chemistry sets and fantastic novels. One of my earliest recollections is tearing a page out of one of his magazines. He made me suffer for it and I never did it again.

There are maybe a million jobs to do on a farm, even with a hired hand and a tireless tractor. With Pa sickly, we had to start pitching in pretty young. The two of us were great pals. Sure, we'd fight sometimes — but he was just enough bigger and older so the fights never lasted long.

Between chores, Paul still found time for his hobbies. Science was the basis of most of them, and his enthusiasm bubbled over on me. We'd milk cows together and he'd talk about Louis Pasteur. We'd pitch hay and he'd ply me with Isaac Newton.

In North Dakota the stars are almost as clear and bright as out in space. . . . In the evenings, on the way home from town, Paul and I would park the pickup in the prairie and sit there looking up at the stars. Paul seemed to know all of them by name — Orion, Vega, Aldebaran, and the Big Dipper spilling around.

Those stars were *real*, he'd tell me with a funny emphasis. They were *big* and they were *far*. He'd point up at Rigel and say, "Five hundred light-years," and then try to explain how far that was, using the trip from town as a unit. I paid close attention because I was really interested; the stars drew me. But the real scope of the Universe was beyond me. In spite of Paul's facts and figures, I still felt the stars were up there just for decoration, like the lights on a Christmas tree.

Then something clicked in me.

On a wonderfully clear night in July, Paul was pointing out Antares — a little red spark settling on the horizon. Maybe it was the horizon, and the knowledge that the star was beyond it. Paul told me how the sun, *our sun*, could be put in the center of Antares, and how the earth could move around in its orbit and still be entirely within that star. I could visualize the entire picture: our earth but a speck of dust beside the sun; the sun itself a lesser speck beside Antares; and all three of them insignificant atoms of a huge galaxy, which itself was but a tiny unit of a vaster cosmos. At that moment I realized the stars were not up there for my sole amusement.

My feelings were confused. I was frightened, depressed. I saw the race of man as something less than the swarming microbes Paul had told me about. And yet the search for truth and knowledge was nobler than wishful self-inflation.

I was ten years old. My philosophy of life was formed on that night.

Astronomy was very much in the news in those days. The first Orbital Space Station had just been shot up in ten sections. Pictures and data from up there started coming in. The newspapers didn't give much play to the really important stuff — the spectrographic and hard vacuum data — but there was lots of speculation about Mars, Venus, and the moon. Paul and I ate it up.

Alphonse Craig, the Space Station man, was our personal hero. He was somehow far more glamorous than the tall, handsome men who romped around the planets and extra-Solar systems in the video space operas. The fact that he was all alone out there made him even more wonderful. He was closer to the stars than any other man had ever been.

I found out when I grew a little older that the desire to go to the stars is almost an organic condition, like a leaky heart. Some people don't have it at all. Those that do can't escape it.

Paul and I had it! We'd climb up on the roof in our pajamas and watch the August meteor showers. A big one streaking across the sky would send shivers of ecstasy through me. I remember thinking, *that little piece of rock made it, why can't I?*

We looked for the Space Station, of course, but it was too small to be seen . . . Know what I'm driving at, Burns, or am I wasting my breath?

The big man had hardly moved. He was still staring down, twirling the martini glass with thumb and forefinger. He hadn't been taking any notes. Now he looked up.

"The stars in New Jersey may not be as bright as the ones you've seen," he said slowly, "but they're the same ones!"

I know (said Lantry).

You're about my age — you must remember when they shot the parts of the first moon rocket up to the Space Station. Alphonse Craig was putting them together. Greatest single-handed construction job ever done! He had to start from scratch, learning all the null-g and vacuum techniques without another pair of hands nor another brain to help him.

How the videos played him up!

He was too busy to send anything but official signals, and I understand he hated the fuss being made over him. That didn't stop the popularizers! The public wanted Craig, and Craig it got — by proxy of course — heroically battling the dangers of space . . . Now I know why he stayed up there so long — he was afraid to come down!

Everyone had more or less taken it for granted that Craig would pilot the moonship once it was finished. But all the time somebody else was being groomed for the job — you know — Bob Jessup. When the moonship was about two-thirds done, Craig was ordered down for a rest. As it turned out, the rest was permanent. He never went into space again.

Paul and I took it pretty hard. I guess we had both identified ourselves with Craig in our hero-worship. Paul was pretty well buried under farm work, and it looked like whatever dreams he'd had for himself were going to take root right there. I'd had only a second-hand dream — a hand-me-down from Paul, like the clothes I wore. But losing it hurt. I was an exceptionally puny, pimple-faced kid of fourteen, and even more than Paul I must have longed to fly out to the moon in my imagination with Craig.

Craig had spent almost two years out in space — and now they were sending another man to take his place! We were stunned at the injustice. It never occurred to us Craig might not have wanted to go — we only felt he'd been deprived of the right.

Nights we'd lie awake at the radio, waiting for news. Coming down, Craig's shuttle-rocket almost cracked up in the Pacific because the weight was doing funny things to his insides. He was in a hospital, but the public demanded him and within a week he was out of there.

The New York reception broke all records. He was all but smothered and cheered to death. The city spent two days digging its way out of ticker tape — worse than the '57 snowstorm. Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington left Craig barely enough strength to crawl back home to Minnesota to rest. He took a temporary job teaching space kinetics at the University, liked the life, and decided to stay.

The first moonship was a failure, so you don't hear much about it any more. Jessup was as good a rocketeer as ever lived, but he was tackling a completely new thing. He crashlanded in Imbrium, alive but unable to get back. The information he radioed did more than anything to make the second ship a success . . . I've seen the wreck. The air had leaked out slowly, and Jessup was still inside, dried like a mummy. . . .

I'm not boring you, am I, Jeff — telling you all this stuff you already know?

All right, then . . . As I said, Alphonse Craig settled down in Minnesota. Paul and I started talking up the idea of making a pilgrimage — of actually visiting Craig, maybe even talking to him. The idea scared me at first — I felt too inadequate, even for that. But Paul fired me up until I was eager to go. We planned the trip and talked about it for a year, but somehow the necessary time and money never came together. Finally the idea died out, became just another dream, almost as unattainable as space itself.

For obvious reasons, I was never meant to be a farmer — or anything else that I could see. Without encouragement, I'd never have dreamed of college. The encouragement I got — from my teachers, from Paul, but most of all because Craig was there at Minnesota, only a few hundred miles away.

I won't bore you with what it took. Without Paul's help I couldn't have done it . . . But I was on a Minneapolis bus just a day after my nineteenth birthday, scared to death and carrying all my belongings in a small suitcase. And soon I was a Freshman student, sick because they wouldn't let me take space kinetics till the fourth year. I'd never been more lonely, and my dream had never seemed farther.

I don't know just how I got up the nerve to call Alphonse Craig on the telephone — but I did just that. He had a reedy, absent-minded sort of voice. What I said that prompted him to invite me to his house I never knew, and you can imagine how I felt.

He came to the door himself, a wiry fellow of medium height with very bright eyes which looked me over speculatively.

"Ah, yes — it's Lantry, isn't it? Come in."

I shivered with something as near to ecstasy as I've ever felt. My vision blurred, and I wondered vaguely what the deep thumping was before realizing it was my heart. Dumbly I followed Craig into a room that was littered with books, diagrams and calculations.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Craig," I managed finally. "I've been — uh — interested —"

"Yes, yes," chuckled Craig. He was still looking me over with those bright, lively eyes. "How old did you say you were, Lantry?"

I told him.

"Grew up on a farm, you said. Your health good — heart, lungs, all that stuff?"

"The Health Service thought so."

"How about eyesight?"

"Twenty-twenty."

He stood there awhile as if in deep thought, still looking at me speculatively. Then he sighed and sat down behind the littered desk, motioning me to a chair.

"You said you were interested in space flight, Lantry," he said. "How interested?"

"All my life — that is — I've been studying rocketry and the associated sciences —"

"Yes, yes," Craig said impatiently. "It might interest you to know that I looked up your grade transcripts and Health Service report after you called — very good, both of them. What I meant was interest of another sort."

"I've followed your —"

"I didn't mean that either," he said, reddening a little. "What I meant was, did you ever think of space flight in a personal sense — of trying it yourself?"

My throat was dry and I swallowed trying to loosen it up so I could speak. "I'd — I'd give anything —" I managed finally. Then the old feeling of shame and inferiority locked my tongue.

"Go on," prompted Craig, leaning forward and looking at me intently.

"I've never thought of myself as the type!" I cried, stung to anger. "Look at me! How can I ever —"

"Exactly what I meant," interrupted Craig. I had the feeling he knew my answers before I uttered them. We sat for awhile in silence, while I cringed inside and wished I hadn't come.

"Lantry," he said finally, "you know the second moonship is just off the drafting boards."

"Yes."

"It'll be a couple of years before she's assembled out at the Station and ready to fly. *How would you like to fly that ship out to the moon?*"

I thought he was having a cruel joke at my expense. I must have looked about ready to cry, because Craig's face softened with understanding.

"I'm not joking," he said softly. "And I know you don't think of yourself as the heroic type. But space travel is a new thing, and it's going to need a new kind of hero."

"Let me tell you about myself, Lantry. I was a space-struck kid like you. I pointed my entire life at being a rocket pilot. There were thousands of others like me, but I was always sure I'd be the one to make it first. I should have known by the time I was fifteen that I wasn't born for space. Do you know what stopped me? *I was too big!*"

"But you're not so — you were on the Station —" I stammered.

"Sure. The Station job requires a little bit of brawn — wrestling with masses takes muscles, even in null-g. But have you ever stopped to think what the payload of a space ship is worth? Even atomic fuel needs exhaust mass, and no one's been able to make a ship that will land on the moon and take off again with a mass ratio of less than ten to one . . . Lantry, do you know what the *ideal* space pilot would be? A weightless can of hard vacuum! But that lacks one essential feature, the ability to punch the right buttons. So we must look for the next best thing, the puniest, skinniest human being who still has the brain and the heart to reach for the stars . . . Lantry, how tall are you without those elevator shoes?"

"Around four eleven," I lied.

"And what do you weigh?" asked Craig, smiling.

"Ninety pounds," I lied again.

"That's just 100 pounds less than the average space opera hero. A hundred pounds less of useless, oxygen and food consuming muscles. For every pound we have to provide ten more pounds of fuel, which means bigger tanks, bigger ship, still more fuel . . . Do you still think you're not the type, Lantry?"

I must have stood for a long time open-mouthed. Like the day I first knew the stars, I discovered myself. A thousand memories of being hemmed in by bigger men, by looming shoulders, tumbled out and vanished. I saw Paul, my big brother, lifting sacks, pitching hay — three to my one. He could make his way on earth. *But I was made for space!*

Craig must have understood and liked what he saw in my face, because he reached over and grasped my arm.

"You don't have to answer right away," he said, "but I'll repeat my question. *How would you like to fly that ship to the moon?*"

The muted murmur of people and tinkle of dishes had the peculiar quality of deep silence as Lantry stopped talking. Burns had scarcely moved during the monologue. His eyes had remained downcast, his fingers playing with the frail martini glass. Now he sighed, a deep sound in his massive chest.

"I knew it was something like that," he said, looking up with eyes that were full of hero worship. "You didn't even know what you had. Some day — maybe even in ten years — we'll have ships big enough to carry hulks like me to the moon or Mars. But the pint-sized space jockeys will always be there first. I hope you realize how lucky you are!"

Lucky. Lantry thought of tomorrow and the weeks to come. He knew now why he did it. It was the only thing he was suited for — mind, body, and soul! He felt very tired.

"Guess I'll turn in," he said, closing his eyes.

"I know how you must feel," said Burns, reaching out a hand that engulfed Lantry's. "And — thanks for everything!"

They got up and walked down the aisle together, the Greek God and the Midget. And every eye in the room followed the Midget.

Note:

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To emulate John P. McKnight's terseness: He has written another story as tight, as sharp, as original as his much-admired Prolog (F&SF, August 1951) — and we don't envy you your dreams after reading it.

Bird Talk

by JOHN P. MCKNIGHT

IN ONE SENSE, the birds in our wood made words for me, too.

I had observed that a lot of the little fellows were evidently hagglers, since they cried constantly, "Cheap, cheap." There was a neurotic one that complained of the "heeby-jeebies." Another said, "Here we are," another, "Cheerio," still another, "Pretty, pretty, pretty."

Most articulate (and most annoying) was one who perched just outside my study window and who invariably, at the moment I was disgustedly reading over something I had written, offered the ironic comment, "Literature, literature."

But that was simply matching English words to the sounds the birds made. Of course the birds did not talk English. They talked their own bird talk.

This important fact was solemnly explained to me by Lynn, our neighbors' daughter, who was four, whose crystal prescience was at once that of seers and of small children, and whose vocabulary was incredibly adult.

"They do not make words at all when they talk, John," Lynn told me. "Instead, they make sounds that . . . that make pictures inside your head. They do not need words."

"And can you see these pictures, Lynn?" I said it gently, for I try to be gentle with all childish fancies.

"Well . . . yes, John. Sometimes. Most of the time. I do not think I see them as clearly as the other birds . . . as the *birds* do. But I see them. Like . . . like you see your face in the bathroom mirror when it is all steamed over."

"And what pictures does the twittering make inside your head, Lynn?"

"Not *twittering*, John. . . . They make pictures of how they hate the big noisy metal birds that fly over so high and so fast. The airplanes, they mean, John. And sometimes, when Daddy forgets to put out fresh suet for them,

they make angry pictures of . . . I don't know, it's all mixed up, fat juicy worms and old strong suet. And . . . and pictures of pretty places where we're *not*, John. We *people* . . ."

I was typing away busily when Lynn came to call yesterday. She said she wanted to tell me of something that the birds were talking about, something new that had them very excited, something that she didn't understand but that frightened her. I was mildly vexed at the interruption, for I was writing well. Indeed, I gave less than half an ear to Lynn's prattle. And as soon as I could, I got rid of her, using the first device that came to mind.

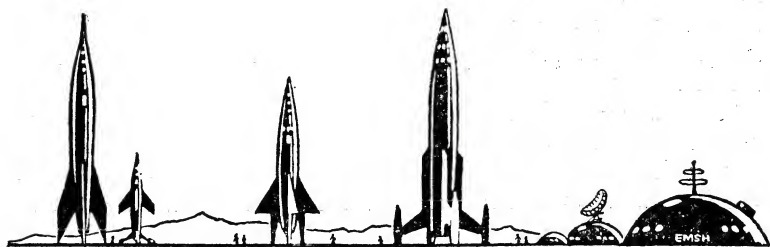
"Go and try to talk to the birds, Lynn," I said. "Tell them that you understand their talk. Ask them to tell you more about this. And then come back and tell me."

Today, I have resorted to every trick of mnemonics to try to bring back each word that Lynn said yesterday. But I can recall all too little.

I remember her saying something about "the biggest birds of all — but *not* airplanes, John." I remember that she said the little birds were very happy about these biggest birds, that would come from far away. I remember one entire sentence. "It makes a picture of a whole world that is one great big thick forest full of birds, the big birds and the little birds, and nobody else."

But that is all I do remember.

The reason I have tried so hard to remember is that I think it may be important. For at daybreak today, after searching the whole night long, we found Lynn far back in our wood, her blue play suit in shreds and her body black with the dried blood of hundreds, of thousands of tiny deep wounds.



It is the sad lot of the meteorologist, while almost all of his scientific colleagues take turns starring in science fiction, to find himself featured only in an endless succession of weather-man jokes — as common a butt of folk-humor as mothers-in-law, absent-minded professors and farmers' daughters. Now one of the younger science fiction writers gives the meteorologist his proper place in fiction, with this ingenious analysis of a possible future situation in which survival itself may depend upon a proper plotting of isobars and isotherms.

Tomorrow's Weather

by HILBERT SCHENCK, JR.

A JET PLANE needled over the Western hills, its vapor trail threading the ridge-top-cumulus as pearls on a string. The meteorologist watched its passage with interest. "Temperature inversion," he said finally with satisfaction as the wispy trail became crooked and potty in the wind. Then he returned to his instruments, whirling the sling psychrometer carefully in the cool air. Behind him the woman also followed the jet with her head, following it until her sick eyes could not distinguish the fading speck.

"It's the first one in weeks," she said slowly.

"Eh? Oh, yes, I 'spect it is at that." He carefully noted down the readings from the two thermometers and turned to his rainfall gage. She watched him, her face working, searching for words.

"Why?" she blurted. "What's the point of these readings, these instruments? Whose to know what they are? Who cares?"

He straightened in a gentle, quiet movement. "My job," he explained as though to a child.

"Job," she answered. "You have no job. I keep telling you that. Every day I tell you that the weather bureau is gone, bombed. There's so few people left it doesn't matter what the weather is going to be. They have other worries. Can't you understand that nobody cares what the weather is?"

"I care," he said.

Tiredly she turned to the door of their house. "I suppose you do. I don't

know why I bother arguing. It does give some pleasure, I guess."

He stared at the figures on the clipboard in his hand and pursed his lips. "Rain, tomorrow," he muttered. "Of course, the Pacific High might send it northward, but we're bound for some anyway."

Inside the little house the woman tiredly set a fire in the small grate. She peeled stunted onions, picked from the scabbly patch at the kitchen door. "This weather forecasting," she began again. "It frightens me. You're living in the past. It's not right you should be so interested in the weather, now that everything is so changed."

He smiled. "What you're trying to say is that I'm insane?"

Sharply she shook her head. "No, of course not. It's just . . ."

"When man first began on this planet," he interrupted her with a slow gesture, "the weather was the most important factor in his life. His food depended on the weather. The weather gave him ills and crushed his homes. His gods were gods of the elements of weather. If we're to start again, we may as well start understanding the weather. Don't you see that it'll be easier then?"

She shrugged angrily. "But there's no one here to find out what the weather is to be. If there were, then it would have some sense, but there's nobody."

"There may be somebody, someday," he said.

The next day it rained. The meteorologist watched the solid drenching sheets soak the ground and clucked with satisfaction. The Pacific High must have cracked and let a storm, born in the South Pacific, sweep in on the land. He read his instruments carefully and noted down the results on his clipboard. Then, curiously, he read another instrument that had not usually been associated with weather. He plotted the results on a prepared graph. Thoughtfully, he puffed out his cheeks and blew softly. The woman looked up from her sewing and frowned.

"Now what?" she asked sarcastically. "Is it preparing to rain for 40 days and 40 nights?"

He chuckled. "Such an archaic device is out of place in the world of science. The weeding-out process will be accomplished more sweepingly this time. By my figures, the radioactivity will top the danger mark tomorrow. This storm is rich in radio-nuclei. Apparently the Pacific Trades are above critical now and . . ."

"Do you mean we are in danger from radiation poisoning?" Her face was a little white.

"Well, if the count leveled off tomorrow night, our safe dosage would be exceeded in several months, but by that time, the half-life of the various elements will be expended. If the count continues to climb at the present

rate, it's difficult to determine when the critical exposure will occur. I'll try and work it out on my slide rule, but I don't know. These double logarithmic things . . ."

"Perhaps we should move?" She was sitting up quite straight now.

"To where?" he asked.

The next day the rain continued without let-up. Beating down on the muddy turf, it formed rivulets and ran as surface water. The trees bent with their weighty leaves. It had been a fertile summer.

Carefully the meteorologist worked over his records. He frowned frequently at the figures that sprawled away under his pen. The woman sat next to him, watching with bloodshot eyes. "How is it now?" she asked suddenly. "How long?"

"It's the rain," he said. "It's collected the dust thrown into the stratosphere and brought it back to earth. Three weeks with the present trend, I figure."

"You figure!" she shouted. "You figure too much. What can we do? Can't you tell us what to do?"

"I'm not a nuclear physicist," he answered shortly. "Meteorologists aren't supposed to learn about such matters. It's enough to learn to compute the energy of an air mass. . . ."

"Those instruments . . . useless! All this time you spent reading them and what good does it do? What good?" She was almost screaming.

The meteorologist scratched his head. "I'm thinking," he said. "People in other places are having the same problem."

Two more days it rained, sullenly, leadenly. The dampness seeped into the house and muddy footprints on the floor showed that the meteorologist had been out to his rain gage. "This is quite a storm," he said, sitting deep in an old armchair. "I imagine a polar air mass must be blocking its movement over the plain states. If only I could look at a weather map . . ."

The woman warmed her hands at a small fire. "There is no weather map," she almost snarled. "There'll never be a weather map again at this rate." Her eyes were blood-red and their lids drooped. She shook continually and glanced fearfully about as though the radioactivity might suddenly become visible. "Try the counter again," she urged.

The meteorologist shook his head. "Wear out the battery." He puffed on his pipe and nodded almost imperceptibly at the fire.

"You're a fool," she said bitterly. "You sit there and think it's civilized to die without a whimper. Well, I'm going to whimper . . . plenty." A sudden thought struck her. "What about Death Valley? It's dry there. No rain to contaminate."

He shook his head again. "They threw too much at Los Angeles. The whole area is unsafe. It's the weather that's important. You see if we could look at the overall weather picture, we could tell where the air circulation would be safe. What it takes is a pronounced high pressure area, stable and energetic. But I can't even guess . . ." He snapped his fingers. "Say, that ham rig of George's in the shed. It has a crank generator, I believe?"

The mention of the dead son made her wince, but she saw hope in his face. "Yes. He was using it before . . . before the . . ."

Leisurely, he rose. "Let's go back, shall we? You can crank for me."

The meteorologist sat calmly at the push-to-talk mike as the woman eagerly turned the surplus Army hand generator. "That's about the speed, I think. Well, here goes. CQ, CQ, CQ, CQ, Fresno, California. Anyone, please. CQ, CQ . . ."

"Hello, Fresno. James Applebee, Glencoe, Illinois. Do I read OK?"

In her excitement the woman stopped cranking. "Keep turning it," said the meteorologist, a little strain showing in his face. "Hello, James. Do you by any chance have a Geiger in operation?"

"No, Fresno. But I made an electroscope and calibrated against the kitchen clock radium dial. We're in trouble. I give us a month at present level and the count seems to be going up."

The meteorologist pursed his lips. "James, I may be able to help us. I'd like a complete report on the weather in your area, please. And will you take down my questions so you can assist in further calls?"

"Roger, Fresno. But why weather?"

"Weather spreads the radio-nuclei. Now first, barometer reading. Do you have it?"

"Just a sec . . . 29 point seven two. Not very accurate. It's an old instrument. . . ."

"All right. Temperature?"

"Ahhhhh . . . 76 and a half."

"Wind direction and velocity? Look outside and tell me what is occurring. I mean whether leaves are fluttering, smoke drifting, that sort of thing."

"A little sapling in the yard is bending slightly. I guess direction at nor-norwest or thereabouts."

"Fine. Now the sky, describe the clouds to me and what percentage of the sky is covered."

"I know that one. Alto-stratus and seven-tenths covered." The voice in the speaker seemed pleased at its accurate survey.

The meteorologist wrote rapidly on a pad. "Very good. Now will you start calling on a different frequency and ask these same questions? Record the time of each conversation. I'll contact you in a few hours. OK?"

"Roger, Fresno. Will do. Sign off now."

The meteorologist turned to the woman. "Like a rest?"

"No; keep going. It's so good to hear the voices. . . ."

He picked up the mike again. "CQ, CQ, CQ, CQ, Fresno, California. Anyone, please . . ."

They worked at it all night. Drinking coffee and talking half way around the world to the myriad voices. Finally the meteorologist got tiredly to his feet. "We have enough," he said. "Let's go back to the house."

In the livingroom he went quickly to his desk and drew from a manila envelope a large folded square of paper, bearing a printed outline of the Western Hemisphere. With the joyful swiftness of a fine craftsman he filled in the symbols. Steadily the isotherms and isobars formed under the rapid, scratching pencil. The wind symbols appeared like little flags pointing the direction and showing the strength. "I wish you'd go to bed," he said to her.

"I'll wait," she answered. "I've been tired before."

What had been only a bleak outline map was now alive, vibrant with the sure symbolism of the meteorologist. The last wind flag went down, the last temperature was recorded. He stared at it. A tired smile grew over his thin face. "Yes, yes of course!"

The woman, dozing fitfully in her chair, came up on her feet. "What?" she asked. "What does it tell you?"

"Intense high pressure over Kansas. It's splitting the front around it like a butcher's knife. The count is high there, but it will not go any higher for at least two weeks. I would say the energy of that anti-cyclone was sufficient to deflect anything in the offing. And by the time it does crack, the half-lives will be pretty well expended." He got to his feet. "Get the stuff into the car quickly. I can use battery power to call the others."

In the ham shack he switched the rig to precious batteries and began again. "CQ, CQ, CQ, CQ everyone. Do not interrupt. Listen. Weather survey indicates central Kansas to be safe for at least two weeks, probably longer. Repeat. Weather survey shows . . ."

In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a man with a badly burned arm drove a loudspeaker truck through the streets talking about radioactivity and Kansas. When he died, two teen-age boys took over.

A Tennessee ridge-runner put on his shoes and counted his children. Then he loaded the whole mess of kids into a '36 Ford. He passed new Cadillacs and Lincolns parked and useless by the roadside, but it never occurred to him to change cars.

A Negro housemaid from upper Westchester County puzzled over the four machines in the garage. She finally decided on a Chevvy coupe that had belonged to the young one. After the car was loaded with water and

canned food, she went to close the heavy door and saw the front hallway had gotten dusty and the silver was not locked in the safe. Uncertainly she wavered, leaning from one foot to the other, and began to hum slowly. "*When Israel was in Egypt land . . .*" Turning, she ran across the lawn to the coupe.

The chilling, benevolent monster that turned slowly over Kansas was a single-pole magnet. It drew the rubber-tired filings to it from every place in the battered land. The brutal California storm was an ill-tempered child in comparison, revolving upon itself and feeding on its own gigantic energies. The anti-cyclone was ponderous and dignified. It circled quietly and the winds were sharp and biting. In the arrowing cars people turned on the heaters and talked about the weather.

The meteorologist sent his car down the empty highway at 80 miles an hour. The sharp Kansas night seeped into the car and the woman shivered fitfully. Then his foot was down on the brake and the car wavered over the road, yielding its velocity with loud protest. "Whaa . . .?" The woman was awake.

"Hitchhiker," he said. It was a girl, slumped by the side of the road, her car twisted grotesquely on its back in the field.

He supported her with his arm and walked her to the car. She was cold and seemed dizzy.

"Going too fast," she muttered. "Felt faint and lost the wheel."

The meteorologist looked at her smiling. "No one to come with you?"

"I'm all that's left in my town. One person out of hundreds."

"Two persons," corrected the woman, helping the girl into the back seat.

"Oh?" said the meteorologist as he brought the car back up to speed.

"Well, this cool weather will be a relief, I expect. Carrying a baby when the humidity is up can be mighty unpleasant . . ."

But, of course, the two women paid no attention to him.



Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

MARTIN GARDNER's detailed study of the lives and works of our hermit-scientists, *IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE* (Putnam), was published late in 1952: no fiction or non-fiction has yet come along to equal it in importance and entertainment. Writing with amiable objectivity, Mr. Gardner has recorded those vagaries of ratiocination that have given too many too-willing believers such explain-all, cure-all gospels as those of orgones and orgastic potency, dianetics, homeopathic medicine, General Semantics and the like. Expounded in detail are such lunacies as the true history of Atlantis (as well as Lemuria and Mu), the basic inferiority of all non-Nordic races, the surety of the earth being flat (or hollow), the complete cure of all ills by the consumption of blackstrap molasses or, if one prefers, the application of "electronic" wonder boxes to various parts of one's anatomy. In his account of such promulgators of error as Reich, Velikovsky, Ignatius Donnelly, Voliva and others of that legion who have discovered lost races, "revolutionized" astronomy or geology or built perpetual motion machines, Mr. Gardner subtly makes two very important points: the crank too often started on the path of controlled research, only to stray off to Mt. Shasta; and, since the most jargonistic double-talk finds its faithful reader, there must be a crack for every pot. A great many of the aberrations he treats, on such varying levels as those of the Fortean Society, Mr. Frank Scully and Drs. Korzybski and Rhine, have become standard elements of science fiction; it's especially healthy to have this clear-sighted analysis of where our fictional "science" shades off into entertaining, but definitely non-scientific fantasy. Yet, while the book points many a moral, it is tremendous fun!

Those who enjoyed the symposium on the immediacy of space travel in *Collier's* will want the greatly expanded book version of that discussion, *ACROSS THE SPACE FRONTIER* (Viking), edited by the symposium's chairman, Cornelius Ryan. With the exception of Willy Ley's contribution, the book is just a bit lacking in ease of style but it will be invaluable both as a reference work and a detailed survey of the problems of space travel and their possible solutions. The illustrations, especially those of Chesley Bonestell, are unsurpassed in their technical and artistic excellence. Charles Galton

Darwin contemplates man's future history in *THE NEXT MILLION YEARS* (Doubleday). Frankly, we were vastly entertained by his ideas . . . and didn't believe a single one of them! Only one example is necessary to show that, for all the graceful clarity of its writing, this is not plausible extrapolation, but pure fantasy: Mr. Darwin's reasoning is all posited on the thesis that space travel has no place in any phase of our future development!

Recently we expressed some bitterness concerning the pretentious attempt to fuse science fiction with the "serious" novel in Bernard Wolfe's *LIMBO*. We're now happy to report that such an attempt has been brought off very well indeed by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. in *PLAYER PIANO* (Scribner's). This novel of a collapsing civilization in the near future succeeds in blending skilfully a psychological study of the persistent human problems in a mechanistically "ideal" society, a vigorous melodramatic story-line and a sharp Voltairean satire — succeeding largely because it extrapolates trends only a little beyond their present points. As a result, much of its study of man's "logical, intelligently-arrived-at botch" has contemporary validity and it offers no glib solutions for said "botch" but contents itself with an acute statement of problems. Isaac Asimov's *THE CURRENTS OF SPACE* (Doubleday) has no such immediacy, but provides first-rate entertainment; its remote Galactic-Empire plot-counter-plot has little to do with science fiction, but is so much more adroitly plotted than Asimov's previous ventures in this vein that it stands up as an intricate and constantly surprising spy-suspense story.

First hard-cover appearances of older fiction are topped by C. L. Moore's 1943 *JUDGMENT NIGHT* (Gnome), an opulent and exciting romance of a far future devoted to a scientific sybaritism that would have made Tiberius' eyes pop, written with the colorful warmth which one expects of Miss Moore (and which one does not find in the routine novelets chosen to pad out the book). As a period piece, Jack Williamson's 1938 *THE LEGION OF TIME* (Fantasy Press) is grand fun, as the Old Master of the space-opera turns to the time-opera with fine swashbuckling and much ingenious speculation on alternate worlds; again the short novel which fills out the book pulls down the average sharply. Even more of a period piece is Stanton A. Coblentz's 1932 *THE PLANET OF YOUTH* (FPCI) — pleasing in period for its irony and economy, but pretty slight today.

Most sheerly entertaining of recent short stories are the Ozark folk tales gathered by Vance Randolph in *WHO BLOWED UP THE CHURCH HOUSE?* (Columbia University), 100 wonderful anecdotes (about a quarter of them fantastic) ranging from smoking-room bawdry to pure midnight chills, in the authentic verbatim narration of Ozark story-tellers — with, if you insist on being serious, excellent scholarly apparatus in an appendix. Alistair

Cooke's three short Christmas stories, CHRISTMAS EVE (Knopf), include one modern version of an old fantasy, and are all told with the witty urbanity to be expected of the m. c. of TV's OMNIBUS. THE RED PERI (Fantasy Press) is inevitably a collection of Stanley G. Weinbaum's lesser work, since the cream was bottled earlier as A MARTIAN ODYSSEY AND OTHERS, but those who, like us, admire Weinbaum as one of the most original and stimulating forerunners of contemporary science fiction will find even these minor stories of interest. There's less excuse for the unevenness of P. Schuyler Miller's THE TITAN (Fantasy Press), since it's the first collection of this usually able writer's work. The two typically Miller stories are available in anthologies and the other six are a mixed lot in which striking ideas conflict with treatment that is sadly routine.

The first of 1953's anthologies, THE PETRIFIED PLANET (Twayne), has a brilliant basic idea: Commissioning a scientist (in this case Dr. John D. Clark) to set up all the physical specifications for a peculiar alien world, then commissioning three prominent writers to produce novelets to meet those specifications. Unfortunately for any coherence in this first experiment, the three writers come up with three widely inconsistent interpretations of Dr. Clark's data and with stories which as fiction are equally inconsistent with their own high standards. The last of the 1952 anthologies, Groff Conklin's OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE FICTION (Crown), was all but ruined by a desperate effort to produce an enormous book (as long as five issues of this magazine lumped together); containing quite enough admirable stories (especially those by Sturgeon, Leimert and Padgett) to make a distinguished small anthology, it buries these in third-rate wordage.

The major event among imaginative reprints is, of course, the reissue of E. R. Eddison's THE WORM OUBOROS (Dutton). First published 30 years ago, this epic romance has been unknown to most readers but warmly treasured by a few who found it unique in the resonant clangor of its prose, the tremendous impetus of its story-telling, the magnificent audacity (and sternly convincing consistency) of its fantasy concepts. This reissue, it is to be hoped, will make a whole new audience aware of one of the major imaginative novels of this century — not science fiction, though it is nominally set on the planet Mercury, but the detailed creation of a vividly heroic alien history. Equally welcome is the first paperback edition of Aldous Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD (Bantam), with a fascinating analytical foreword by the author — a novel which has strongly influenced much science fiction thinking in the past twenty years and still stands as one of the literary highpoints in the field. Scarcely in the class with these two, but still commended as highly enjoyable fiction are the brightly written short stories of Frederic Brown, SPACE ON MY HANDS (Bantam).

Certain of R. Bretnor's friends — nice people, too! — are completely unaware that he is a writer. These know only Bretnor the ailurophile and hold him in high repute as a breeder of that most delightful of all cats, the Siamese. For their especial attention, then, as well as for the general hilarity, we offer this complete, unbiased narrative of certain occurrences in the Department of Modern Languages that shook the ivy-crowned walls of Bogwood College to their ancient foundations and, alas!, led to the resignations of several eminent members of its faculty.

Cat

by R. BRETNOR

I HAD NO premonition of disaster when Smithby married Cynthia Carmichael and took her off on his sabbatical. No inner voice whispered its awful warning in my ear when it was rumored that he was spending his year of leave in research of a strangely private nature. Even as his department head, how could I know that he was bringing *Cat* into the world?

His year drew to a close, my own sabbatical began, and off I went — intending, after three therapeutic months in sunny Italy, to seek the scholarly seclusion of Scotland's National Library for the remainder of my time. But it was not to be. Scarcely a week after I arrived in Edinburgh, the letter came.

Did I say "letter"? There was no letter in the grimy envelope which had followed my wandering path from Naples north. It contained only a brief note and an enormous clipping from some cheap green newspaper.

I glanced at the curt message:

Dear Christopher,

Smithby has betrayed our tradition and our trust. Your entire department is in turmoil. Three of us have already tendered our resignations.

Witherspoon

For one dreadful moment, I closed my eyes; and Smithby's face, a pallid mask of modest erudition, appeared before me. Then, with trembling fingers, I opened up the clipping:

WIFE'S LOVE PROMPTS SCIENCE TRIUMPH!
*Young Bogwood Prof Wins Plaudits For
First Cat Language Studies!*

the headlines screamed with a malicious glee, above a photograph of Smithby and his spouse, each grasping a large feline. Stupefied, I read on:

New Haven, August 5: For the first time in nearly a century Bogwood College flashed into the limelight today as Emerson Smithby, professor of English Literature, bared what scientists acclaim as the outstanding discovery of the age — the language spoken by cats.

Giving full credit to his wife, blonde curvesome Cynthia Smithby, the surprisingly youthful savant this morning outlined highlights of the gruelling research that enabled him to break down the hitherto insurmountable barrier between man and the so-called lower animals.

Professor Smithby said, in part:

"Cats not only have a language — they have a complex culture not basically dissimilar to our own. I first began to suspect this when Mrs. Smithby and I were honeymooning; and she assisted me untiringly, lending both her own cats for the enquiry.

"As soon as we convinced them of the importance of the project, we progressed rapidly. In less than two months, we were able to prattle conversational *Cat* with some fluency."

Professor Smithby then revealed that he has already issued a text for beginners: *Cat, Its Basic Grammar, Pronunciation, and General Usage*.

He refused, however, to discuss a rumor that, through the efforts of Gregory Morton, widely known cat fancier and member of Bogwood's Board of Regents, courses in *Cat* will shortly be added to the curriculum.

Professor Christopher Flewkes, head of Dr. Smithby's department, could not be reached for comment.

I sat there staring. Lucid thought was impossible. Blind instinct told me that Bogwood was in peril — that Bogwood needed me — that I must catch the first boat back.

Nothing could have prepared me for the reception Fate had arranged in the Faculty Club on the night of my return. Perhaps the bright light over the desk in the lobby blinded me as I entered; perhaps my preoccupation with my own harried thoughts prevented me from seeing the cat. Whatever the reason, I had no inkling of its presence until its sudden scream informed the world that I had stepped upon its tail.

It was a strange tableau. The cat had fled, leaving me standing beside

my fallen bag in the middle of the floor. From behind the desk, the clerk — a young Oriental hired in my absence — glared at me through a pair of those curious spectacles known, I believe, as harlequins.

"Do you, my sir," he demanded with placid insolence, "practice to come and step upon the guests? If so, go to where you belong."

I stifled my anger. "See here," I replied, "I am Dr. Flewkes — Christopher Flewkes."

The fellow smiled. "Then the stepping will be an accident. I have knowledge of you. You are Flewkes. I am You."

I thought: *The man, of course, is mad!* "Indeed?" I exclaimed. "You are me?"

Still smiling, he shook his head gravely. "It is not Mee. It is You — Beowulf You. I have named myself after an English literature. You will be glad."

"Very well," I snapped, "you are You. Is my room ready?"

You bowed, unruffled. "I am here for studying," he informed me. "At the night, I am a clerk; at the day, I am studying *Cat* with some progress. In *Cat*, I am even possible to get a passing grade."

"Is my room ready?" I repeated grimly.

"In a certainty, my sir," said You. "At a moment, I will accompany with my presence. Now I must assure our guest of your apologies —"

He went to the cat where it sat nursing its bruised appendage in a corner. "Ee-owr-r," he said, very courteously. "Meow meeu mr-r-ou."

The cat paid no attention whatsoever; and You, with a worried frown, hastily took a small volume from his pocket, referred to it, and repeated his original comment several times.

Finally, the animal raised its head. "Meow," it said plaintively.

You bowed. Then he turned to me happily. "You are forgiven, for it is a cultured one. Now we ascend upstairs."

I nodded feebly. As we turned toward the staircase, I saw that the lobby was full of cats. They were on the chairs, on the rugs, before the fire. They were even on the mantel under the portrait of Ebenezer Bogwood.

I entered my room. In a daze, I heard You's ungrammatical goodnight at my door. Wearily I sat down on the bed — and, in doing so, I spied the Announcement of Courses for the current semester lying on the bedside table. I fought against the urge to pick it up — but I was powerless. I reached for it, opened it, turned the pages. And I saw:

Department Of Feline Languages
Emerson Smithby, Ph.D., Chairman

This was followed by a list of courses — *Cat* 100 A (Elementary,) *Cat* 212

(Philology,) *Cat* 227 (Literature) — and by other pertinent data, including the information that all instruction was in the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Smithby.

Hopelessly, until day was breaking, I wept for Bogwood.

I did not wake until shortly before the luncheon hour, when the telephone rang to tell me that Witherspoon was awaiting me downstairs; and sad indeed were my thoughts as I forced myself to rise and dress. Witherspoon's note had mentioned resignation from the faculty; and now the impulse came to me that perhaps I should join him in his tragic withdrawal from the academic world, that perhaps we both had been outmoded by the science of a newer age. Finally, with clothing draggled and beard uncombed, I stumbled down the stairs.

I entered the lobby, and heard that familiar voice greeting me, and saw those long shapeless tweeds unfolding from a chair by the fireplace.

"Bertrand!" I cried out, and in a moment I had him by the hand.

I gaped at him in my astonishment. Was this the gentle, melancholy Witherspoon whom I had known? He still stooped; his gray locks were as sparse as they had ever been. But I saw instantly that the old Witherspoon had vanished — that here was a man of iron!

He seemed to read my mind. Leading me to a chair, he brushed a cat aside so that I might sit there. "Christopher," he said, his high voice very firm, "I am still at my post. The time has come to fight — and fight we shall!"

At this, my heart filled with black despair for our lost cause. "How can we fight, Bertrand?" I exclaimed, pointing at the feline population of the room.

Witherspoon seated himself beside me. "Have courage, Christopher! These wretched creatures," he gestured at the cats, "are not to blame. Even Morton, vile as he is, is but a tool. Our enemy is Smithby. We must destroy him by fair means or foul!"

His eyes almost flashed as he said it. He lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "I've planned the strategy of our campaign," he hissed. "Shall I reveal it to you?"

"Do, by all means," said I, leaning forward eagerly.

But Witherspoon had no chance to answer me. Even as I spoke, his glance shifted. Fists clenched, narrow brow frowning sheer hatred, he glared past me at the lobby's entrance.

I had not noticed those who passed through to the dining room during our conversation. But now I looked about me — and beheld, coming across the floor, Smithby and Cynthia Smithby, with Beowulf You trailing in

their wake. A long black cat was draped over Mrs. Smithby's shoulders in startling contrast to the coiled golden hair above it. Another cat, a Siamese, was carrying on a pleasant tête-à-tête with Smithby, who bore it in his arms.

I heard Witherspoon gnash his teeth in my ear. "Look at her!" he muttered viciously. "She looks like a cross between a cream puff and a Valkyrie."

The description, I must say, surprised me — later I learned that Witherspoon had heard it from a student. Still, it was not inaccurate. But for her heroic stature — dwarfing her husband by half a dozen inches — Cynthia Smithby would have suited Charles II to a T. She resembled Herrick's Julia: a splendid figure rather too ample for the modern fashion, a small red mouth, a tiny rounded chin, a rolling eye.

She was the first to see me. Instantly, an elfin smile touched her lips, and she changed her course. Head high, she came toward me.

I drew myself erect, to await her with a stern and uncompromising countenance. I knew that Witherspoon was wrong. *Here* was our enemy! Here was the Lilith who had seduced a weakling from the stony path of sober scholarship! I knew at once that there must be no pretense, that I must make my attitude quite clear.

Flushed and radiant, up she came. "Dear Mr. Flewkes!" said she, her voice low and musical. "What a delightful surprise! I am most glad to find you once again among us." She lowered her lashes in mock modesty. "And so is Emerson. Are you not, Emerson?"

Smithby blushed with embarrassment, fidgeted with a thin book he was carrying, and nodded with obvious pleasure.

"So much has happened since you went away," she went on, "so much that is very wonderful. But then —" She laughed a pretty laugh. "You can catch up by attending Emerson's seminars."

I forced myself to look into her eyes. "Madam," I declared coldly, "half my life has been devoted to the service of this institution and to the preservation of its austere ideals. I can only hang my head in shame when I observe the sad decay of what was once a great tradition. Neither by word nor deed will I condone this treachery!"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a hurt look come over Smithby's face; I saw Beowulf You gape stupidly. For an instant, too, Cynthia Smithby pouted like some sensitive child suddenly rebuked. Then, with a toss of her head, "Mr. Flewkes," she said, "truly I am glad that you take this stand, for here —" she turned to Smithby, "here is the challenge that we need. Your genius, Emerson, will surmount this wall of classical conservatism. Our present project is certain to succeed. Then we will have proof positive and undeniable, and Mr. Flewkes will come to you with his apologies."

"Oh, not to *me* —" There was a calf-like worship in Smithby's eyes. "To *you*, Cynthia dear. The credit will be yours. The world will know that you have done it all!"

Beowulf giggled. "Then Flewkes will also make research in *Cat*." He peered at me through his harlequins. "I can give help. *Cat* words have one nice syllable, like Cantonese."

"Why, Beowulf —" Cynthia Smithby smiled archly. "You must devote your time to learning it yourself. You've failed every other course, you know. But let's have luncheon. Come," She took Smithby's arm. "And now, dear Mr. Flewkes, we bid you — *miaow*."

As the dining room door closed behind them, I slumped back heavily into my chair. "My God, Bertrand," I muttered, "she — she mewed at me!"

"I believe," he answered, "that she was saying good-bye to you in *Cat*."

I wiped an icy perspiration from my forehead. "It is not Smithby who is the evil genius — it is she!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Witherspoon. "It's simply that she wears no brassiere — and you are too impressionable."

I flushed. "But — but what of her new project?"

"All froth and foolishness, believe me. Some silly toy her husband's given her. How could it be more? She does not even have her Ph.D."

This argument, of course, was quite unanswerable. I held my peace.

"*He* is the culprit," continued Witherspoon. "Surely you saw that small book he was carrying? It is his latest work — *Back Fence Ballads, Translated From The Original Cat*. He sings them, Christopher, to all his students, accompanying himself upon the lute. I have been told that his caterwauling is magnificent. And there's the extension course for lion tamers, conducted in the evenings. It has brought strange folk to Bogwood, I assure you."

He broke off. He pointed an apocalyptic finger to the heavens. "Do you wonder," he cried, "that I have taken desperate measures? Do you wonder that I have hired a private eye?"

"A — a private — eye?"

"Ah, to be sure," said he. "I must explain. That is what he calls himself in the vernacular. He is a sleuth, Christopher. I brought him from New York, where hardened criminals flee at the mere mention of his name."

I started to expostulate, but Witherspoon would brook no interruption. "I have arranged for you to meet him, to lunch with him. Not here, but secretly — at an establishment known, I believe, as Jakey's Java Joint."

"But, Bertrand," I protested feebly, "how can this person aid us? How?"

Witherspoon uttered a fierce, triumphant laugh. "Be patient, Christopher! Soon you will know all!"

I remember little of that first guarded meeting. Hulking, unshaven fellows wolfing their food in grubby cubicles, lewd language and coarse jests, vile music from an automatic instrument — all these I can recall only vaguely. My first unfavorable impression of Luigi Hogan, though, is still distinct. Small and round and surprisingly hairy, he neither looked nor behaved like a detective.

Witherspoon and I had turned up our coat collars and pulled our hat brims down to avoid recognition, but Hogan's sharp little eyes saw us immediately we entered, and he greeted us with much pointless snickering. When he had pulled himself together, introductions were performed; and, in a moment, he and Witherspoon were plotting in undertones over thick cups of lukewarm coffee.

Hogan's diction was atrocious; his underworld argot was almost incomprehensible to me; he talked and laughed with his mouth full of salami sandwich. Even if our encounter with Cynthia Smithby had left me in full possession of my faculties, I doubt whether I could have gleaned more than occasional fragments of the conversation. I noticed that Hogan addressed Witherspoon as "Chief." I heard him say that he had been attending Smithby's extension course for animal trainers. I even caught the very words in which he recounted Smithby's advice to them: *Y' gotta show 'em you ain't afraid er nuttin', see? Y' gotta get right inner cages wit' 'em, see? Y' gotta talk t' them goddam big feelions like you was brudders.*

Witherspoon's expression became positively bloodthirsty at this point. "Hogan," he said, out of the corner of his mouth, "you go find us a circus or a zoo, see? With a good big vicious tiger, see? Heh heh! We'll challenge Mr. Smithby to go and reason with him in his cage. He can't refuse. Catch on?"

"I catch, Chief." Hogan snickered loathsomely. "Th' Press'll eat it up."

"Not just the Press," murmured Witherspoon with a ghoulisn leer. "No indeed!"

As for the rest of what they said — well, he gave it to me in outline as we walked by obscure streets back to the campus. The idea of Smithby becoming an hors-d'oeuvre for a tiger was not their main plot. Hogan was to watch him constantly until he committed some dangerous indiscretion, preferably of an amorous nature. Then he was to secure photographs which we could use to disgrace Smithby, to procure his swift dismissal. As a last resort, he was to provide a person known as Marilynne, who had yet to meet failure in her career of breaking down male inhibitions.

Ordinarily, I would have been profoundly shocked by the utter ruthlessness of these methods. But now, aware only of Bogwood's dire plight, I shared Witherspoon's ferocity and felt no qualms. One thing alone per-

turbed me — Cynthia Smithby. True, she had no proper academic qualifications; the chance of her making any new discovery dangerous to us was remote indeed. Still, might not Smithby, after all, be nothing more than a red herring dragged by a shrewd, designing woman across our path?

Waiting for Hogan's labors to bear fruit was no easy task. Vain doubts and fears tormented me incessantly — and all the while things went from bad to worse. Against our bitter protests, a course in Feline Culture was added to the awful list. The Press, keeping *Cat* constantly in the public eye, greeted with laudatory reviews the appearance of Smithby's handbooks for zoo and circus personnel: *Basic Lion*, *Basic Leopard*, *Basic Panther*, and so on. And the columnists, meanwhile, harped on the rumored progress of Cynthia Smithby's project, the nature of which she was still keeping secret. It was, they hinted, a way of teaching *Cat* so simple that any child could learn it in an hour. Might it not, they asked, eliminate the need for baby-sitters, for kindergarten teachers? Might it not change the social and economic structure of the world?

We had our moments of encouragement. There was the day when Hogan was able to announce that he had made arrangements with a menagerie which owned a tiger, elderly and quite untameable, who had put an end to the earthly career of at least one trainer. The challenge had been mailed to Smithby. The newspapers had been informed. And you can well imagine that Witherspoon and I fairly jumped for joy when we saw the headlines. CAT PROF MAY TAME FIERCE JUNGLE LORD! they shouted.

But Smithby weaseled out of it. Chatting with any normal tiger, he announced, was most enjoyable. This was a different matter. This tiger was clearly psychopathic. "He needs a feline psychiatrist," said Smithby. "After all, even though I speak English, I would not try to reason with a human maniac armed to the teeth." And the servile Press praised him for his "hard common sense!"

The weeks dragged by, and our furtive meetings at Jakey's Java Joint brought more and more discouraging reports. Every small detail of Smithby's life was known — and irreproachable. Perversely, he insisted in behaving as a model husband. Even Marilynne, when finally we brought her from New York, found him quite unassailable. Even Marilynne, in whose hennaed presence poor Witherspoon blushed like any schoolboy, exercised her talents all in vain. With each attempt, her remarks became increasingly sarcastic, until eventually she abandoned us — leaving behind a note in which she suggested that a catnip mouse might bring us better luck.

Oddly enough, the collapse of Witherspoon's carefully contrived plans did not daunt him in the least; nor would he listen to my suggestion that

henceforth we should fight Smithby on purely academic grounds. He insisted that we keep Hogan in our service; and, when I objected, he threatened to bring "goons" to "settle Smithby's hash."

Even when we learned that Smithby had complained against us to the Board of Regents, even when we were summoned to appear before that august body, he did not share my quickened fears and my despondency. "Ah, Christopher," he cried, shaking his fist, "on Friday we must go before the Board. That means we have three days! Believe me — something will turn up, and we will face the lot of them triumphantly. We will see Smithby crushed and broken yet. *Cat* will be nothing but an evil dream!"

How bitterly the jesting gods play cat-and-mouse with all that we hold dear! On Friday morning, drowned in despair, I was making my hopeless way toward the campus when, to my great astonishment, a large red cab came to a screeching stop beside me, and its door flew open to eject an exultant Witherspoon, who seized me by the arm.

"Victory is ours!" he trumpeted, pulling me to the vehicle. "Hogan just telephoned! Smithby is in our trap!" Before I could utter a word, he bundled me into the back seat ahead of him, and slammed the door. "Yip Lee's!" he shouted to the driver, and we were off.

I got nothing further from him during that mad ride, for seemingly he knew no more. "I told you so, I told you so!" was the ecstatic cry with which he answered all my questions; and, when we reached our destination, a Chinese restaurant in the commercial district, I was as mystified as ever.

Leaving the cab and entering, we were greeted by a Celestial who spoke to Witherspoon by name. We were led upstairs to a small and private room. And there, upon its threshold, I saw a sight which took my breath away. In the center of the room stood a table and five chairs. Two of the chairs were empty. Two were occupied by Luigi Hogan and a well-dressed, middle-aged Chinese. On the fifth, covering his face in shame, sat Beowulf You.

As soon as he saw us, Hogan struck an attitude. "De whole t'ing's washed up, guys!" he declared. "All dis stuff about *Cat* — it's phony! Your Smit'by — he's a fake!"

I heard Witherspoon gasp; I heard a muffled sob from Beowulf You. "This is incredible!" I cried. "Why, I myself have heard him speak to cats. I've heard them answer back. Deplorable it is, yes — but surely it must be more than a mere web of fraud? Explain yourself, man."

Hogan began to quake with merriment. "It's — it's simple!" he giggled. "Shrimps!"

"*Shrimps?*" Witherspoon and I echoed the word with one voice.

But Hogan was too convulsed to answer. He jerked a thumb toward the Chinese gentleman beside him.

The Chinese smiled gravely. "That is correct," he said, bowing. "I, you see, am Chester You. I am the uncle of this dull youth —" With some distaste, he indicated Beowulf. "This dull youth with the absurd glasses, who has repaid me for bringing him to this country by failing to master even the rudiments of English. I am also the proprietor of the Pilgrim Fathers Seafood Market —"

He paused courteously while we took the vacant chairs. "For some time," he went on, "I had seen Professor Smithby come in regularly once a day, followed closely by Mr. Hogan. Furthermore, Professor Smithby always bought exactly ten cents worth of shrimps, refused to have them wrapped, and put them directly in his pocket. My curiosity was aroused — and, a day or so ago, I took the liberty of speaking to Mr. Hogan about it."

Hogan smirked.

"He and I compared notes. When I learned who my strange customer was, my interest redoubled. We Chinese, you know, revere learning, and my disreputable nephew's devotion to *Cat* had caused me much distress." Chester You's countenance assumed an expression of extreme severity. "Mr. Hogan and I came to the only possible conclusion. We tested our theory with Hwang-ho, my own pet cat; and the results were indisputable. He immediately became vocal at a whiff of shrimp. So this morning we took Beowulf to task. Confronted by the evidence, he confessed all!"

Beowulf held his fingers to his ears, moaning softly.

"Yes," declared his uncle, "this wretched boy admitted that he had uncovered Smithby's secret, and turned it to his own dishonorable advantage. Smithby, you see, mewed at the cats — and the cats mewed for shrimp. There was no more to it than that."

"Do you mean," I exclaimed, "that all those people merely pretended to understand *Cat*?"

"Believing that Professor Smithby understood it perfectly, they feared to reveal what they regarded as their own stupidity."

I shook my head. "Surely no group of intelligent men and women —"

"Come, come, Christopher," protested Witherspoon, "I've seen the same sort of thing a dozen times in the Philosophy Department."

And I was forced to admit that he was right.

Then Witherspoon pushed his chair back and rose. "We are grateful to you, gentlemen," he asserted grimly, "for placing this monstrous swindler in our power. Now we can purge dear Bogwood of his presence, his mewing sycophants, and his nefarious works." He showed his teeth. "It is 11 o'clock. In half an hour the Board of Regents meets — and you have earned the right to share our triumph, the triumph of true learning. Let us go! Let us grind vile Smithby in the dust!"

Without another word, he turned and strode toward the door; and we followed him, Chester You urging his weeping nephew forward with an ungente hand. My heart was high indeed as we left the restaurant and entered Hogan's car.

The Board of Regents was to meet, of course, in Cruett Hall, in the chamber dedicated by Ebenezer Bogwood to that purpose. It is a long room, panelled in ancient walnut, full of tradition's gentle gloom. Upon its walls hang the stern portraits of those scholars who, through the generations, have filled our presidential chair — and, as our small procession strode down the hall toward it, there came to me the thought of how their noble spirits would rejoice when Witherspoon and I pricked the miasmic bubble which was *Cat*.

My doubts were all dispelled. My fears had vanished. Like conquerors, we passed the bowing flunkey at the door —

Imagine, if you can, the sight which met our gaze. At the head of the great table, gaunt and gray, sat Mr. Sylvester Furnwillie, Chairman of the Board. At his right hand was seated the President of Bogwood; at his left, the loathsome Gregory Morton puffed at an opulent cigar. The six remaining Regents were ranged on either side. Beyond them, Smithby stood. Across from him, his wife reposed. And, at the table's very end, sat an enormous tomcat, staring at Mr. Furnwillie with cold, green eyes.

Smithby, all unaware of our entrance, was speaking. “. . . therefore,” he was saying, “we observe that the *hsss-s-s* of Old *Cat* gradually changed to *fsss-t-t* in ordinary Modern *Cat*. That shows how simple the functioning of Grimalkin's Law can be —”

“*Ha!*” cried Witherspoon.

Smithby suddenly was still; all eyes were on us.

Mr. Furnwillie lifted his spectacles with a palsied hand. “Dear me, dear me!” he said uncertainly. “You are some minutes late, are you not? You really shouldn't keep the Board of Regents waiting, gentlemen. No, indeed. Dr. Smithby has preferred some serious charges. Oh, *very* serious. He states that you have had him followed everywhere, and that you even hired a trollop to — er — seduce him. Tsk-tsk! We can't approve such goings-on at Bogwood, gentlemen. Now can we? After all —”

He broke off. He peered at Hogan and the Yous. His lofty forehead wrinkled with distaste. “Who are these people, Witherspoon? They cannot be alumni; they do not have the Bogwood look about them. Eh? Are they relatives of yours?”

Witherspoon folded his arms across his chest, and, in an awful voice, he answered, “*They are Smithby's doom!*”

There was a frightened murmur from the Regents. Gregory Morton emitted a vulgar feline expletive. Mr. Furnwillie exclaimed distractedly.

Witherspoon silenced them with one contemptuous glance. He pointed straight at Smithby. "Yes, his *doom!* We admit his charges, Flewkes and I! *We* hired Hogan to dog his wicked steps. *We* employed Marilynne. And we are proud of it — for by our humble efforts we have saved Bogwood from degradation and the world's disdain!"

Like Jove about to hurl his thunderbolt, he seemed to grow in stature standing there.

"Smithby!" he cried. "Smithby, your hour has come! Resign. Go far away. Never again befoul this sacred air! Beowulf has confessed your villainy, and we know all. *We, Smithby, know about the shrimps!*"

He paused. A dreadful silence reigned.

"Yes, the shrimps — the shrimps which Smithby conceals about his person, gentlemen!" Like a shrill trumpet, his voice shook the room. "*Cat* is a sham, a mockery, and a hollow fraud! No one can speak a single word of *Cat!* The creatures mew for — *Shrimp!*"

He stopped. We waited for the earth to open under Smithby's feet, the heavens to fall. And —

And nothing happened.

I looked. Dumbfounded, I looked again. Several of the Regents were whispering to each other and casting the most peculiar glances in our direction. Mr. Sylvester Furnwillie was conferring with Gregory Morton. Smithby and Cynthia Smithby were exchanging smiles. The large, striped tomcat was pretending to stare unconcernedly out the window.

"Wh-what does this mean?" demanded Witherspoon.

Mr. Furnwillie ignored him. He looked around. His countenance assumed an aspect of extreme displeasure. To me he said, "Professor Flewkes, though I am deeply shocked by this vindictive and absurd denunciation, it does not surprise me. It is in keeping with the questionable associates, the reprehensible activities. Such things we might expect of Witherspoon, for he is not originally a Bogwood man. But not of *you*. Tsk-tsk. I am most gravely disappointed. Indeed I am. You — well, you should be *ashamed.*"

Shocked to the core, I started to protest. He did not let me.

"Professor Flewkes, we *know* about the shrimps. Of course Professor Smithby carries them, just as some men carry cigars to give their friends. Why shouldn't he? I carry them myself. Surely you don't expect a cat to smoke cigars?"

"B-but — but Beowulf —?" I stammered.

And it was Smithby who replied. "I think I can explain that," he said, a little sadly. "Not long ago, and much against my will, I was forced to tell

poor Beowulf that I was flunking him. He was emotionally upset. I fear that, faced with his inability to master *Cat*, he sought refuge in the pretense that no one could."

Mr. Furnwillie thanked him. "You make it amply clear, Dr. Smithby — and I am only sorry that this incident should have marred so bright a morning —"

Behind me I heard the voice of Chester You snap out an angry phrase in Cantonese. I heard a squeal of pain from Beowulf as he received some corporal punishment.

Mr. Furnwillie smiled. "When you have added such a glorious leaf to Bogwood's laurels." His smile disappeared. "Yes, Professor Flewkes — this morning Dr. and Mrs. Smithby proved the validity of *Cat* to our complete satisfaction. They showed us the result of Mrs. Smithby's splendid project in education and research. Their proof is absolute, beyond cavil, and quite beyond the shadow of a doubt!"

"*You lie!*" screamed Witherspoon, livid with rage, trembling in every limb. "Don't try to tell me that this illiterate woman has taught each one of you to babble *Cat*! This is another fraud! And you are aiding and abetting it! I shall inform the Press! Hogan and I shall expose you for what you are!"

"Tsk-tsk!" Mr. Furnwillie said reprovingly. "If you behave like that, Witherspoon, you'll have to leave the room. I cannot babble *Cat*, as you so coarsely put it, but Mr. Morton can, and —"

Witherspoon whirled. "Come, Hogan, Flewkes! Let us seek the society of honest men!" He marched toward the door; and at the door he turned. "Furnwillie —" He roared defiance like a wounded lion. "*Furnwillie, I resign!*"

Then he was gone. The only sound was Hogan's foolish giggle in the corridor.

I lacked the strength to follow. Mutely, I stood before the Board, all my high hopes for Bogwood in ashes at my feet.

Mr. Furnwillie put on his spectacles and took them off again. "Dear me," he said, "how violent the man is! Even though Dr. and Mrs. Smithby, in their complaint, did ask us not to punish him, I fear that we must accept his resignation."

"Certainly!" growled Gregory Morton; and the other members of the Board nodded solemnly.

Mr. Furnwillie sighed. "Ah me, this leaves us with a painful duty, doesn't it? We should do *something*, I suppose, about Professor Flewkes?"

He looked at me, and so did all the rest. Even the tomcat favored me with a fixed regard.

I summoned all my shredded dignity. "Gentlemen," I answered, "I shall

spare you this harsh necessity. I, too, shall seek a more congenial atmosphere."

And it was then that Cynthia Smithby, with a little cry, came to her feet and ran to me. "Dear Dr. Flewkes!" she pleaded, clinging to my arm. "Do not resign! Why, Emerson and I are both so fond of you — we could not bear the thought. I beg you, stay! Let us convince you —"

As the impassioned words poured forth, she drew me willy-nilly toward the table's end.

"Let us open to you our brave new world, where cats can take at last their rightful place, contributing to science, culture, and the arts. Believe me — you will see the day when cats shall vote, hold public office, and instruct our youth. Perhaps there even may be peace on earth under a parliament of Man and Cat!"

She pointed at the tomcat on his chair. "Look! Only look! This is Rabindranath. He's the living proof!"

Roughly, I shook her off. "Madam," I exclaimed, "I am no fool. You may delude your students. You may deceive Mr. Furnwillie in his senility. But you can not persuade me that you can teach a language which does not exist!"

"Oh, *please*," she implored, "I do assure you — you do not understand. I'll introduce you to Rabindranath. His interests lie within your own domain. He's starting to translate *The Aspern Papers* into *Cat*. Dear Dr. Flewkes, at least will you not speak with him? Will you not converse?"

Two tears flowed like dewdrops down her cheeks. They did not move me. "Converse?" Contemptuously, I gestured at the cat. "No, never! Never will I demean myself to — *mew*!"

And — ah, cruel gods!

Coolly, Rabindranath looked me up and down. "Mew?" he said. "That will be scarcely necessary."



Last August that fascinating professional publication, the Information Bulletin of the Library of Congress, undertook a serious examination of a problem of immediate future import to all writers and readers, which we feel deserves to reach a wider public than that at which it was originally aimed. We are deeply grateful to our librarian-writer friend W. B. Ready of Stanford University (whose fine new story "DEVLIN" appears in this issue) for calling the article to our attention, and to the Library of Congress and Mr. Reines for permission to reprint it.

The Shape of Copyright to Come

by DONALD F. REINES

RECENTLY THE EXAMINING DIVISION of the Library of Congress has observed the large number of publications of all sorts dealing, either factually or fictionally, with the conquest of space, and has come to believe that the concept which H. G. Wells called "the leap in the air" is entering the consciousness of modern man. This new facet of the mind, plus the rapid rate of growth of modern technology, has led the Examining Division to the inescapable conclusion that human beings, most probably Americans, will land on the Moon before 1960, and on Mars and Venus before 1975. In its usual forward-looking manner, the Examining Division has considered the implications of these acts insofar as they relate to the Copyright Office and the Copyright Law.

The very first question to be considered is the applicability of the Copyright Law to the Moon. Most astronomers believe the moon is uninhabited, so it will be claimed in much the way Antarctica is now, by the various nations sending expeditions there. It will most likely be used only as a way station for trips further out in space, but assuming some poet stationed there prints and distributes a book throughout the American colony, the question arises as to whether it can be registered, and in what class. The majority feels that it should be accepted under the conditions which apply to the territories and possessions of the United States, but the minority holds that only an ad interim registration is possible, since the Moon is

most certainly *outside* the United States. Several have expressed merely their hopes of retiring before the first landing is made.

Mars and Venus present much more difficult questions, for on these planets we may encounter strange forms of intelligent life, speaking and writing in many different languages. If they are friendly and produce objects similar to the present classes of registrable articles, will we establish copyright relations with them and register these items? If we do, the recruitment of native personnel of these planets to handle the applications in the Copyright Office becomes a necessity, at least until the languages are well known on Earth. While it is highly desirable to bring all this new material into the collections of the Library of Congress, some present members of the staff have gone on record to the effect that they will not work with anything green in color, scaly in texture, or over fifteen feet tall. As segregation has never been sanctioned here, it is felt that this problem should be brought to the attention of the Employee Relations Officer.

Moreover, it is possible some Martians or Venusians may have more than one head. In this case, would we register the work of one of these creatures as that of a single author, or would the name of each head be set down as co-author? It is important that this matter be straightened out, for more reasons than one.

Further out in space we encounter problems of a different nature. It is apparent that the 28 year term of copyright will cause great hardship to those authors domiciled at the other end of the Galaxy, for in many cases it takes more than 28 years to reach Earth from those areas. A book published on Aldebaran and dispatched immediately to the Copyright Office would reach here in its 36th year, too late to register. The rule deduced from this is that the term of copyright must be increased in proportion to the distance we move from the Copyright Office. If this is not done there may be retaliatory measures and the breaking off of copyright relations, resulting in the works of American authors being unregistrable on Sirius, Canis Major, 23 Cygni, and other far-flung places. It will not sit well with the American publishing industry to know that its best sellers are in the public domain throughout most of the Milky Way.

We may have to leave these matters to the deliberations of the first Intergalactic Copyright Convention, but we can pass on to the reorganization of the Office necessitated by the tremendous amount of new material these planets and stars will furnish. Since the present system of examining is considered inadequate for such a work load, it has been suggested that we install a giant thinking machine, possibly occupying the entire Annex, into whose circuits we build the Copyright Law and all decisions made in the courts and in the Office. (It is estimated that 20,000,000,000,000,000,000

vacuum tubes should suffice.) Applications will be submitted on punched cards which will be fed into the machine and either accepted or rejected immediately. Doubtful cases which now require five or six weeks of deliberation can be cleared in one-millionth of a second, thus eliminating our backlog and our Friday afternoon reports concerning them. This alone will save 27,375,549 man-hours per year.

Since persons having a knowledge of cybernetics, nuclear physics, general semantics, non-Euclidean geometry, and electronics are not usually available in the labor market, it is expected that we will use the present staff. Mistakes will be made at first, but this is not unusual in any large scale changeover.

One suggestion for handling the mass of statistics produced by these operations is that we hire "calculating wizards," those strange persons who can perform tremendous mathematical calculations in their heads. It is felt that the fact these wizards are usually idiots outside their ability to calculate should not be grounds for barring them from employment, since the Examining Division has never discriminated in this way in the past.

We feel that, in keeping with the glorious traditions of the Copyright Office, we must make every effort to solve most of these problems now, so that the pilot of the first rocket to the moon can make his flight with a mind free of anxiety, and with the knowledge that the Service Division, the Examining Division, the Cataloging Division, and the Reference Division, are all solidly behind him. And we do mean behind.

We'd like to add two extrapolatory guesses of our own: Just as the United States is now one of the three significant book-publishing countries (the others are China and the USSR) that refuse to belong to the International Copyright Union, so it will resolutely stay out, in turn, from the Interplanetary, the Interstellar, and the Intergalactic Copyright Unions. And the Authors League of America, including all of its farflung branches in the American colonies on sundry planets, will still be vainly beseeching Congress to revise the American copyright law which, among its many attractions, allows a man's writings to become public property during his own lifetime.

Now here, as is right and just at this time of the year, is a story of Irishmen on St. Patrick's Day. But there's nothing funny about it. No one knows better than an Irishman that the Gael is no vaudeville comic; in sober truth, his grin is sour and his jealousy can be sad and bitter. Only an Irishman, and only such a gifted one as Mr. Ready, could tell this uneasy story of the envy of the men of the Holy Redeemer parish, how it led them to organize a band of pipers and to make a queer march indeed on St. Patrick's Day.

Devlin

by W. B. READY

THE DEVIL is a man is a woman is a stretch of road or a remark a drink or a gun; he may come with money or with the lack of it. As a serpent he came to naked Eve, and it was as one of themselves, as Fleur Devlin, a stocky, gingered, weathered man of about 40 summers that he came to the parish of the Holy Redeemer and gelded it. Only the shrill high cry of the infant is heard now, the soft tones of women, the cracked voices of the old, in the streets and houses that are around the school and the church where Canon Flood, dried and shaking with age, offers up his daily Mass for the well-being of the men of the parish who disappeared with Devlin upon Saint Patrick's Day.

Along with the men is gone the saffron, the glowing golden lovely saffron, the feathers and the piping and the emerald green, all that had come with Devlin. Sometimes, in the dusk, through dun drab dyeing, a gleam of saffron might yet glow in the worn fold of a shawl, or in the swirl of the skirt of one of the little girls, but the yellow saffron stuff is gone, gone with the men and with Devlin—where? Only the good God knows, and whether He will ever tell remains a part of the sad story that is not yet ended.

All the other parishes in Hanford, which is in Connecticut, had their own bands, brass bands, fife and drum bands, percussion bands, they all had their own bands to march behind upon Saint Patrick's Day, but the parish of Holy Redeemer had nothing. They used to sneer and to jibe at the Redskin Fife and Drum Ensemble, shivering and ruffled, that led Mary Immaculate; they had great apparent fun as went by the Girl Per-

cussioneers high-stepping in front of Sacred Heart, but the Holy Redeemers were hiding their sickness of envy, for year by year they had to step out behind a hired band while the other Irish men of Hanford could heel-and-toe it to the tune of the great marches traditional to the occasion, to *Who Fears to Speak of '98*, *Who Blushes at the Name?*, to *Sweet Heart of Jesus Fount of Love and Mercy*, and, for the crown of the day, the march up to the Cathedral steps, up Main Street, to *The Wearing of the Green*, the Holy Redeemers had to step along to the tune of *Anchors Aweigh* or *Moose and Elk Together*. These tunes were as inappropriate for the occasion as would have been *Hearts of Oak* or *On, On Oberlin*, but Felix Sontag's band, the only one for hire, usually performed at the banquets of fraternal organizations. They were dressed like admirals, hence *Anchors Aweigh*. The band was the visible reason why the Holy Redeemers fell so fully into the trap of Devlin, for indeed it was a shabby snuffling dripping escort, fit only to precede the convalescent, the picadors, the dying or the dead. Sontag's Admirals looked like Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus who were down on their luck, who had been wearing their regalia to work, and because they were generally a seated band, they were worse on their feet than are even ordinary bandsmen who are bad enough, God knows.

That is the way it was, then, when Devlin first appeared. The Holy Redeemers, after wasting the summer in sneering at the other parish bands, with winter coming on, decided that they would have to do something about starting their own musical escort. It was doubtful whether even poor Sontag's Admirals would play for them again, so scornful and diatribic had been the paying off they had received after the last parade, allowed to hobble away at the parade's end clutching their money without even being asked the traditional invitation extended to bandsmen, as to whether they had a mouth on them. With the fall of the year on its early way the men of the parish, without saying much to one another, for they were a taciturn body, those same men, began thinking of starting a band, their own band. They were thinking in an inchoate sort of fashion, to themselves alone; they were open to suggestion, and it was at that classic moment that Devlin first appeared. Nobody ever saw him come in to Loughlan's, nobody ever saw him leave; it seems as if the quiet streets were no place for him. One day, with evening coming on he was in Loughlan's, that was the way of it. Loughlan's was the neighborhood tavern, just a block from the church and the school. Loughlan was one of themselves, the whole neighborhood was Catholic Irish, and a Holy Redeemer boy knew himself a man among his own when Loughlan served him his first beer. It was a decent, orderly sort of place, as taverns go, no better no worse than dozens like it in Hanford. It was a pleasant place for those who kicked with the right foot, and there

it was, on a Tuesday evening in September, that Devlin first appeared, to Loughlan, Ryan, and Curry. They were the lay triumvirate of the parish. Every parish has something like it, for the pastor's weal or woe. Loughlan was a gross dewlapped publican, a gombeen man; Curry was a timid clerkly chemist; and John Ryan was the queer old bachelor sort of a man that abounds in parishes.

Loughlan himself was leaning over the bar talking to Michael Curry and John Ryan when he first saw Devlin, standing beside John Ryan, who had his back to Devlin, facing Mike Curry. Loughlan did a double take; a moment before there was no man beside Ryan, then there was a stranger. Feeling uneasy so faintly that he hardly noticed it Loughlan straightened up across the bar, looking steadily at Devlin and ceasing his talking to his two customers, so that they too straightened up and turned around and looked. Then there was silence around them for a moment, a still chill quiet, almost like the moment of truth. There was a sort of ingratiating around Devlin that was strange to his company, they could not recognize it but were uneasy in it. Devlin stood in their eyes, a man of no especial standing or significance, dressed unobtrusively, neatly, but Irish? — as Irish as Curley or O'Dwyer. There was no denying the look of him: his gingered pale and freckled look, the solid lumpy body, the hot and angry eyes, the long lip, and the way that he held himself showed him for what he was, so that, all unbeknown to them, Curry, Ryan, and Loughlan took him in. There was a sour Irish grin on his face, besides the ingratiating that was all around him. He looked at Loughlan and said, in an adenoidal New Jersey kind of voice, "A shot of whisky and a can of Banntyne's. I'm Devlin, Fleur Devlin. How are you?" His salutation was towards the three of them. While Loughlan was pouring out the brimming whisky measure, and was piercing the can of ale, Curry, Mike Curry, the chemist up at Dupont's said, friendly, "You're new around these parts, Mr. Devlin? My name's Curry, Michael. This is John Ryan and Frank Loughlan." The sour Irish grin came on the more at that. He was lifting his tipling whisky measure up and he supped at it, put it down, before he answered: "No, I'm not so new about here, Mr. Curry. Mr. Loughlan. Mr. Ryan." He bowed at all three of them, a stiff prize fighter's sort of bow, and went on with his drinking, and all the others went on with their talking, about a band. When they looked up and around at Devlin, he was gone.

After his first appearance at Loughlan's in September he came to be there more and more. Nobody ever saw him come and go. John Ryan would turn around, and there would be Devlin, or Michael Curry would look up from the lacing of his emptying glass of beer and would see him. Loughlan would nod to him and, by and by, he was entering into their

conversation, so quietly, so deftly, that they did not notice it. More and more the forming of a band was in the minds of them all, but never a word about that topic from Fleur Devlin until one night, stiffly, awkwardly, seemingly reluctant, he pushed across a post card to the three of them, for it was Loughlan, Curry and Ryan who mattered; the rest of the men barely noticed Devlin; it was those three that concerned him. "Here," he said, "have a look at that." The post card was a picture of the leader of the Boston Milesian band that was an Irish pipe band, and the leader was wearing a saffron kilt and cloak, the cloak secured over his chest with a huge silver brooch of Tara. Beneath it he was wearing a green jersey, and his hose were emerald green, cross-gartered in white. With brogans on his feet, a feathered caubeen aloft on his head, with huge white gauntlets and a staff that was better than the bishop's, the leader was a fine and feathered Solomon. Then Devlin passed around to them a picture of one of the pipe band, all kilted and cloaked, with his pipes swung under his oxtter handily. The post cards were in color, handtinted. Compared to the Redskins of Mary Immaculate, set beside the skirted and capped Girl Percussionneers of Sacred Heart. . . . Devlin could see their eyes glazing as they looked at the pictures. There was envy, there was malice, there was pride in their eyes as they stared. "Where did you get these, man?" Loughlan asked and the other two looked at Devlin, listening, agape, asking for it.

Devlin picked up the post cards carefully, pocketed them. "Sure, they're the talk of Boston. That leader now, is Jerry Dever. He's never been out of Boston, a policeman once, and the band are just men from Saint Dyfrig's parish, you know, the patch parish. They got ahold of the pipes after seeing one of those All-Ireland hurling teams come across with their native band. They've been going for two years now, the talk of the town. New York is after them for their parade. One day all bands will be Irish pipe bands, even the Shriners — that rig is unbeatable and the pipes are fine implements for marching music."

Loughlan, Curry and Ryan took all of this in. They wanted to hear it; it sounded attractive. In their minds' eyes they could see the Holy Redeemers putting all the other parishes to shame upon the next Saint Patrick's Day. His finger was trembling as Mike Curry poked Devlin's stiff, strong arm, looking around at the other two as he spoke, "Could we now, could we, do you think, could we . . . ?" His voice trailed off. He turned his face almost pleadingly towards Devlin.

"There's no reason why not. If Boston can do it, in that old parish, you can. Talk it over with Canon Flood. I'll be back on Friday. If you want to still, I'll tell you more." Then he was gone.

Leaving Mark Conway in charge of the bar, Loughlan and the other two

went straightway around to the Clergy House. Old Canon Flood was as silly as those three were. The pipes, the kilts, and oh! the days of the Kerry dances! Ireland divided never shall be free! He was sold on the idea as soon as they broached it. He went off to bed beaming, thinking how out of joint would be the nose of Monsignor Kirk-Caffrey, of Mary Immaculate, when he, just a Canon, came marching along ahead of his pipers in the parade. "Yerra — that Kirk-Caffrey," he muttered, crawling into bed after saying his prayers. He said that every night, but it had been dim and hopeless for a while, ever since Kirk-Caffrey had broadcast on the Catholic Hour, but with the pipes coming there was juicy bitterness in the saying. The old canon slept well, like a baby old man, that night.

On Friday night, it was a lovely gaudy smelling autumn night, with the moon riding like a car across the sky, Devlin came to them again in Loughlan's. They looked up, and there he was. There was a glint in his eye and a flush on his cheeks — from the autumn air, they thought. He was looking better than they had ever seen him before, more relaxed, more easy, yet acrid. "Here," he said, getting right into it. "Here, this is a catalog from Quinlan's, in Enniskillen, that's in Ireland, in the north, in the occupied part. Quinlan is the man who makes all the pipes, and he'll send you the kilts or the bolts of saffron too, for a song, since your band will be a come-on for the rest of this part," and he spread before them a colored catalog of pipes and drums and staffs and kilts and bolts of cloth so that all of Loughlan's were crowding around and Devlin was gone.

There and then Michael Curry, a B.S. from Saint Thomas Aquinas, began to make out the order. Twenty sets of pipes, the small, handy ones, all beribboned, bolts of saffron, an enormous silver-knobbed staff — the order went off airmail that night, with Loughlan sending a check along with it, that Canon Flood repaid him the next morning.

It was all over the parish in a day or so. Tim Coghlan, the tailor, stopped making the mourning for the women that was his steady trade and moved his machine into the basement of the Clergy House, waiting for the bolts of saffron to arrive, to get busy on them. There was a mean, gombeen streak in Loughlan, else he would not have had a tavern, and there was the meanness of a clerk in Curry, which was why they picked the small pipes, and the uncut cloth instead of the kilts. Devlin did not have to tell them anything — as usual, he left it up to them, and, not being good men, that was enough.

It was true enough what Devlin said, about Quinlan's being anxious for the order. There had been a rash of pipe bands all over the States but it was the colonial Scots piping and the tartan regalia that had caught on, and that Quinlan's organization was bucking, for a brief while, so it was that the whole paraphernalia arrived in no time at all, in a matter of weeks.

The boxes were delivered to the railroad express office, just as they were closing. Larry Costello mentioned it at Loughlan's that night, and Loughlan called Canon Flood who called up the railroad, got the keys from Costello, the silly old man, and, along with half the men of the parish, went down to the express office to pick up the boxes. They just couldn't wait.

It was a quiet, jostling, eager crowd of men that carried and followed the boxes into the parish hall that night. They all gathered around while Loughlan crowbarred them open. The wee pipes, with their ribbons on them, were passed around like babies, and laid on the cafeteria table, one, two, three, four, five . . . until there were twenty of the little strangers, and the staff, that came in sections, was fitted together and hoisted from hand to hand. The Holy Redeemers, and their pastor along with them, were filled with a strange excitement that early winter night. Devlin was among them, although they did not see him. They fingered the pipes ignorantly, timidly, until the Whistler Molloy came upon the scene, panting, still begrimed from working in his paint and body shop. They all parted for the Whistler to get a go at the pipes, for it was a queer thing: there was no musical instrument that the Whistler could not master, after a fashion, in no time at all. He played none of them well, not having either the patience nor the desire, but he could coax music out of all of them, and, sitting on a chair, after a few puffs and blowings up into the chill and wintry air of the unused parish hall, there came the note of the pipes, a squeaking squealing true note, and the whistler went off on his virgin instrument into a quavering rendition of *Hail Queen of Heaven the Ocean Star*. It sounded weird, wonderful and strange, and the Whistler Molloy became the bandmaster forthwith. Parky Hart, who had served in the British Army until recently, when his uncle had brought him over here, was swinging around the staff and flinging it up against the ceiling until the plaster cracked and flaked. He had an air with it, and was a fine supple figure of a man, so he became the leader, there and then on the spot. Before the night was an hour older the twenty pipers had been selected, with their substitutes; in a corner Corny Duane was picking out the drummers from the young teen-age bucks and altar servers, and Tim Coghlan the tailor was running the lovely golden saffron stuff through his hands and was loving it; he had seen nothing like it before; he would have been a good tailor, with half a chance.

The Canon's mouth was working with excitement. His hands were shaking with it.

"Here now, men," he spluttered, and the bustle and the talking quenched as the docile men turned towards their pastor. "Tomorrow night, and every Tuesday and Friday night there will be practice here for the band, under Mr. Molloy."

Mr. Molloy bowed.

"The drums will practice under Mr. Duane in the basement of the Clergy House on Sunday mornings after the Sung Mass, and on every Wednesday when there is not a Legion of Mary meeting."

Mr. Duane bowed.

"Mr. Hart, you will practice with the staff out on the football field of Aquinas College after their night games. I'll arrange with Professor Dogan about the lights."

Mr. Hart bowed.

The Canon took a deep breath. "Now, for the fittings." The men stirred, gathered around him. "I have retained the services of Mr. Coghlan. He is waiting now for the selected bandsmen and their alternates to make their appointments." The men began to make towards Tim Coghlan even before the Canon had ceased talking.

All through the snowed-hard winter the Holy Redeemers set about becoming an Irish pipe band. Whenever they met men from the other parishes, at missions, or at Saint Vincent de Paul conferences, they were arrogant, secretive and unbearable. Even the Bishop noticed the old Canon's newly come spryness and bonhomie at Chancery meetings, and he hoped that it meant that Monsignor Kirk-Caffrey was in for a tumble, for ever since the Catholic Hour debut, even His Excellency had taken up to saying "Yerrah — that Kirk-Caffrey" as he crawled into bed, after his prayers, but, with his Ph.D. from Laval, the Bishop said it in French-Canadian Latin, which made it sound infinitely worse.

Devlin was here, there, and everywhere as the winter wore through. He was advising Tim Coghlan, the woman's tailor, about the set of the kilts. Through Mike Curry, since Devlin kept away from the Canon, he got the idea across that the pipers and the rest of the band should wear long drawers dyed emerald green under their kilts. The Canon was rather dubious about it until Mike Curry muttered something about Holy Purity and at that His Reverence wanted to fit them up with football pants; a compromise was reached whereby the whole band wore long drawers dyed emerald green and the basketball shorts as well, the same color, under their kilts. While the Whistler Molloy worked away instructing in the pipes, Devlin was around also. Nobody actually ever saw him, that they could swear to, but he was there all right.

While the alternates would be piping the first section would be getting their kilts and cloaks fitted by pin-mouthed Coghlan. A bibulous bonnet-maker, whom the Good Shepherd nuns were looking after, was released into the Canon's custody to make the caubeens, and Ronald Coney the poulterer, although an unfortunate Methodist himself, came up nobly with the

feathers, so that Maggie Ellen Cooney, the bonnetmaker, had plenty of them for decorating the hats. The men spent hours greasing their brogans and the Irish Alouetts, a neighborhood ice hockey team, donated them a set of long green stockings and suspenders. Instead of green jerseys they all had T-shirts vatted an emerald green. Bit by bit they were getting together, so that a team of them would be practicing marching out the football pitch under Parky Hart who would lead them, swinging his staff, while another team of them would be squatting piping under the Whistler Molloy, and the rest would be getting a fitting from Tim Coghlan or Maggie Ellen Cooney. The drummers beat their way through skins before the winter was over, and the whole Clergy House used to whirr to their reverberations, but the Canon never minded, and would one of the curates complain? — there was not the slightest chance of that. The only one man enough to stand up to the Canon was the housekeeper, the widowed Mary Slavin, the Canon's sister, but she loved the drumming, being of a musical nature.

Tim Coghlan had never worked so hard in his life. He had his meals brought to him, and he unwound himself from his machine only to fall nightly into an exhausted sleep. The poor old man, it was too much for him. It will weaken him until the end of his days; he is in his eighties now. By dint of his efforts the kilts and the cloaks were ready with the bonnets with days to spare, and, on the Friday, March 15, for the parade was on the Sunday following, the Canon called for a dress parade rehearsal on the Aquinas College football field at 9 o'clock at night.

For hours before the parade there was an Iron Curtain around the arena. It was as if Notre Dame, the whole team, with their offensive and defensive chaplains, had come to Hanford to practise out their secret Romish plays for their coming attack upon that band of young Masons, the Navy. There was not a chance of a stranger getting in to see the performance. In an excess of zeal, Canon Flood even sent Father Corbett up in a helicopter to give him a bird's-eye picture of the proceeding. The poor young priest was prostrate for weeks after it, being a nervous, mystical, airsick kind of cleric. The finger of God may have been pointing at him, saving the pale young curate from Devlin, for the airsickness excused him from the Sunday processional, where down went the other curate, that would-be man-about-town kind of cleric, Father Twomey.

Under the cold glare of the lights the pipers, the drummers, the leader assembled. Canon Flood and Father Twomey, surrounded by the triumvirate and their cronies huddled in a group, for it was a chill March night. Devlin was around, watching. This was the first time that the whole equipage had been tried out together, for while some men had been marching the others had been learning piping, and while some were getting fitted, the

others were rehearsing. This was the first time, then, that equipped, dressed, and standing the pipers were to march in all their green and saffron glory. The Canon licked his lips nervously; it was an apprehensive audience altogether. They had boasted loud and long — now they were about to see — what? Is it any wonder that they were nervous, and the pipers, too?

Parky Hart, the leader, bestaffed, kilted and cloaked, gauntletted like the goat-major of the Welsh, called up the band to order. The men came up like ramrods at his word of command, but when Parky swung around heel and toe to report "All Correct" to the bandmaster Whistler Molloy, who was writhing nervously beyond him, Parky turned, but his cloak did not, the saffron cloak slowly billowed around after him, like a dusky golden djinn descending. In its falling folds the rigid Parky was lost to sight, but, old soldier, he stood firm until the cloak subsided, and then he stepped out briskly stamping to where the Whistler was nervously awaiting. Parky started to stamp across, but as soon as he began to step out the skirt-like quality that Tim Coghlan the woman's tailor had imparted to the kilt — how could he know better? with Devlin whispering to him, the poor man? — held Parky hobbled and spancelled, so that the brisk straight proud military walk degenerated into a cat-like feminine progression. It was as if Theda Bara was back at it again. The men had either to slink along like women or shuffle along like Charlie Chaplin, for they were men in women's skirts, and the long drawers and the suspenders, the stockings and the basketball shorts, all under the kilts, under Coghlan's kilts, gave them a hustled appearance that somehow missed being seductive. It was a queer sight altogether.

The men sidled and shuffled around the football field, under the hard lights, below the hovering helicopter, trying to keep in time with the drums that somehow tapped out a true beat. The Canon and his company were sick with apprehension, but so far it only looked not well, and the bobbing plumes and the lovely colors gave the scene something of beauty, but then the Whistler Molloy gave the signal to the pipers to play.

The pipers, with their beribboned bagpipes snugly tucked, bent down to put their mouths to the reed; they bent, they bent, they bent until their shoulders were pulled down, until their knees were pummeling their stomachs, and still they could not get their piping started. All that would come from some of them was a sobbing droning wail that echoed through the field, frightening. The marching had faltered to a halt while the men tried to get the chanter into their mouths, looking like babies trying to swipe their bottles. It was an awful, grotesque, silly sight, to see skirted men in bonnets trying with flickering tongues to get a hold of the reeds. It was too much for the Canon.

"Stop, men, stop." He walked among them, trembling with cold and yet sweating. "There must be a knack that you haven't mastered yet, in the standing-up playing of the pipes." He turned distraught to Loughlan. "Is there no one here who knows anything about the pipes, Mr. Loughlan? Is there no man at all?" This old voice was shaking.

"There is, Canon." Young Jimmy Dacy broke his before Loughlan could answer. Jimmy was one of the drummer boys. "There is Brother Austin, Canon, up at the College here, he knows about the pipes. He was playing the pipes in an English class, my brother told me."

Canon Flood turned his eyes to the faculty residence that abutted the football field. There was a figure coming towards them from the residence, a thin foxfaced bristling little Christian Brother it was. "I'm Brother Austin," he snapped at the faltering Canon. He went past him and took one of the pipes away from one of the men. He held it out in front of him, the drooping wee beribboned thing, like a priest at the baptismal font. There was silence. Steam was coming up off all of the men, into the still cold illuminated air. The roar of the helicopter was the only sound.

Brother Austin was a Kerryman, with all the dramatic characteristics of that nation. He held the pipes before him silently, then lifted it to his eyes, intoning in a honking voice.

"I wouldn't doubt it. I wouldn't doubt it. I might have known." He turned on Canon Flood that look that Christian Brothers reserve for priests.

"These are not marching pipes at all. This wee thing here is a peace pipe, meant to be played at dances, sitting down. It's the war pipes you need for marching. Here, I'll show you."

Across the football pitch there came running, holding his cassock up with one hand, a young seminarian. Under his other arm he had the pipes of Brother Austin that, beside the pipes of the Holy Redeemer looked as big as a plucked turkey looks beside a plucked Hungarian pheasant. Brother Austin took his pipes from the panting messenger, and hoisted them under his arm. He blew them up and then, in his cassock and on the frozen turf of the lip-up field he began to pace slowly and majestically as he played the great lament of O'Hussey for the Maguire. The sonorous stately sobbing of his piping was a revelation to the Holy Redeemers. All around the field the little Christian Brother paced, and deep down, in all his disconcerted listeners, there flickered for a little while the flame of race.

He came to a halt in front of the Canon and unlimbered his great instrument. He felt sorry for the old man, for the Holy Redeemers, although he didn't want to. That was why he played his pipes all too seldom — he felt sorry for people after it, which is no way for a teacher of English Composition to feel.

"Look, Canon, I'll tell you what I'll do. On Sunday, I'll march with your men, and while they pluck away at their little pipes, holding them up to their mouths like . . . like balloons, I'll pipe away in the midst of them." He looked around at all the finery. "Bedam, nobody will ever notice me in the midst of all this shrubbery finery anyway," and that is the way it was.

The parade was the next day. The sidewalk was crowded with the women and children, the old, and the foreigners. The Holy Redeemers marched along as well as they could, fairly well at ease, with the drums tapping out and with Brother Austin in the midst of them pacing along in his old Prince Albert coat, with his black fedora pushed back on his head, with distended cheeks carrying the burden of the tunes, while the Holy Redeemer pipers with abstracted fingering and wandering eyes did what they could. Then, as they approached Castle Street, a queer and terrible thing happened. Devlin appeared in front of them. The only men who did not see him were Brother Austin and the Canon, and they turned right into Main Street, the Christian Brother piper playing away, and the old priest following him, while Parky Hart, with a wild wordless scream threw his staff high into the air and as he caught it he turned left, through the gaping crowd, toward the Seven Corners, and the band and the Holy Redeemers followed him, who followed Devlin. The pipers broke into a jiggling queer unpractised tune that had queer and pagan undertones. They were stirred up, so that some were shuffling and some were sidling, and their crouching flickering sort of gait caused by the new strange tune caused the feathers of adjacent caubeens to entangle. The crisscrossing of their hose unwound so that they tripped and stumbled. A wind, hot and sultry, came up from nowhere, and billowed out their cloaks, so that the men of the parish, bemused and stupid, followed behind a billowing quaking saffron cloud. To the rest of the parade the left turn of the Holy Redeemers was both a puzzle and a pleasure, but pity came as they looked at the Old Canon, bereft, fingering his lip, standing alone in the middle of the road, until Brother Austin pulled him off on to the sidewalks. The whole remaining parade slowed down to a halt, all listening to the fainting queer and devilish music that went towards Seven Corners. It faded away. It was heard no more. The streets that led to Seven Corners were deserted on that Sunday afternoon — everybody was out watching along Main Street. The Holy Redeemers turned towards Seven Corners, and they have not been seen since.

All the men were taken, every one. The parish is now unhusbanded and fatherless. The men were no worse than thousands like them, but Devlin got them, for a while for sure, maybe for eternity. This is a strange, uneasy story, with no final ending . . .

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